ABSTRACT

Spiritual and Emotional Growth as Experienced by Participants in "The Weigh Down Workshop"

by

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This study identified, measured, and assessed the level of spiritual and emotional growth as experienced by participants in a twelve-week Weigh Down Workshop, a Biblically-based program for weight loss and spiritual growth, held in a local church setting. The Weigh Down program is now present in over 15,000 churches nationwide, and in sixty foreign countries. A group of nineteen persons comprised the experimental group; a group of five persons comprised the comparison group. Four questionnaires were given to both groups over the course of eighteen weeks, each questionnaire measuring Spiritual Well-Being (using the Spiritual Well-Being Scale) and levels of codependency (using the Spann-Fisher Codependency Scale). Participants' weight was recorded on each questionnaire.

The results revealed that the experimental group as a whole evidenced notable cumulative weight loss over the course of the eighteen weeks, accompanied by a significant increase in spiritual well-being, and decrease in codependency tendencies. This contrasted with the comparison group, which recorded a positive cumulative weight gain, and modest changes in spiritual well-being and codependency levels. Both groups demonstrated increased time spent in Bible study and prayer, with little gain in journaling. Means, standard deviations, and *t* scores and *p* levels were

examined to note differences between the two groups, and to provide descriptive analyses.

The results of the research confirm the effectiveness of the Weigh Down Program in participants' lives, both from a spiritual and physical perspective, and furthermore point to it being an effective tool for evangelism and discipleship in the local congregation.

DISSERTATION APPROVAL

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled

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CHAPTER 1

Overview of the Study

Statement of the Problem

On a spring day in 1997 I was driving to several points around the city of Montgomery, Alabama, the state's capital, of modest geographical size with a population of 195,000 people. During the course of my travels that day my attention was arrested by four road-side signs along the city's major thoroughfares--each of them advertising a different plan for dieting and weight loss, with emboldened local or toll-free telephone numbers to contact for information. One sign promised the shedding of "30 pounds in 30 days;" another promised a "miracle weight loss in days."

The presence of such advertising reflects the reality that on any given day, "an estimated sixty-five million Americans are dieting" (Bringle 24). In addition to the proliferation of dieting billboards and placards, one need only walk through a shopping center or mall and see at least one center for weight loss or weight control--ranging from Weight Watchers International, to Nutri/System, Inc., to Jenny Craig, to hypnotherapy.

"We are a nation obsessed with thinness," notes Dr. JoAnn Manson (Land ix). In 1990 the American diet industry earned thirty-three billion dollars, and skyrocketed to fifty billion dollars with the inclusion of cosmetics, plastic surgery, health clubs, and fitness gadgetry (Bringle 26). Historian Roberta

Pollack Seid calculates that today "sales of diet books outrank sales of all other books on the market, except for the Bible" (Seid 4).

Paradoxically, a culture that manifests a growing obsession with thinness simultaneously becomes increasingly overweight. Medical journalist Michael Fumento notes that "obesity is an escalating epidemic of alarming proportions in the United States, and a serious health crisis looms on our horizon" (Land vii). Dr. Frank Minirth notes that "more than 50 percent of Americans are overweight" (Hunger 332). Other experts are less conservative in their estimates: "A quarter of our children are obese, and according to the Institute of Medicine of the National Academy of Sciences, about two-thirds of adults are too heavy for optimum health" (Land xv). When compared with average adult weights in other nations, Americans are clearly "the fattest people in the Western world" (32). In a 1996 Harvard Nurses' Health Study, "nearly one quarter of all deaths in nonsmoking women were attributable to overweight, supporting the national estimate of 300,000 obesity-related deaths in the United States each year" (vii).

As one who has never dealt with a weight problem, and who easily maintains a slightly below-normal weight, the diet phenomenon (which borders on a national neurosis) has always been puzzling to me. Not only was it puzzling, it was distant, and "someone else's problem." That outlook, however, began to change in the Spring of 1997 with the formation of a Christ-centered approach to weight loss that began in the church where I serve as Pastor. "Their problem" became "my concern," as a pastor who desired to minister to the needs of his

flock. The specific description and unfolding of this Christ-centered, biblically based approach to weight loss will follow in the pages of this chapter.

Theological and Biblical Foundation

> *And the Lord God commanded the man saying, "From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you shall surely die" (Gen. 2:16, 17).*

In the opening pages of Holy Scripture, we read of the creation of the first human beings, a man and a woman made in the image of God, and called to love and serve Him in responsible and responsive obedience. It is significant that the first (and only) commandment given to them by God concerned food and its consumption. While the presence of "the tree of the knowledge of good and evil" (Gen. 2:17) and its fruit (Gen 3:2) is probably symbolic in nature, and in fact secondary--indeed incidental--to the central theme of loving obedience to God, it is noteworthy that food serves as the object lesson. Food is aligned with the core issue of obedience, perhaps because "from the moment of our conception, food is vitally important, for without nourishment we cannot live, and without proper nourishment we cannot maintain strength and health" (Kreml 1).

As the Genesis narrative unfolds, we learn that the woman chooses to disobey God, and eat of the forbidden food: "she took from (the tree's) fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate" (Gen. 3:7). With their disobedience to God's command, sin enters the world, and brings its devastating

impact not only to the man and woman, but to all future humanity. Reflecting on the gravity and enormity of this disobedience, the Apostle Paul writes, ". . .through one person sin entered into the world, and death through sin, so death spread to all people because all sinned. . . ." (Rom. 5:15). In short, the entrance of sin into the human condition takes it roots in two human beings' misuse and abuse of food, and the parameters placed around it by the sovereign Creator God. The imagery is as powerful as it is universal, suggesting that human appetite extends far beyond food, in its ultimate quest "to be like God, knowing good and evil" (Gen. 3:5).

Food, though depicted as a source of temptation in Genesis chapter 3, is ultimately a gracious gift of God to His creation. Indeed, the Genesis narrative makes clear the fact that God had provided an abundance of food in the garden for the man and woman: "And the Lord God commanded the man saying, "From any tree of the garden you may eat freely" (Gen. 1:16). Throughout the pages of Scripture we are reminded that God is the provider of food for His people: in the Exodus wilderness where manna and quail are provided for God's people en route to the Promised Land (Ex. 16:18-21, Num. 11:18-20), by the brook Cherith where ravens (commanded by God) feed a hungry Elijah (I Kings 17:4-6), in a humble dwelling where God multiplies oil and flour to feed a hungry widow (I Kings 17:12-14), on Galilean hillsides where Jesus feeds hungry multitudes with bread and fish (Mark 6:34-44, 8:1-9, Matt. 14:13-21, 15:32-39, John 6:5-13). The psalmist praises God for His gracious provision of food: "They all wait for Thee,

to give them their food in due season; Thou dost give to them, they gather it up; Thou dost open Thy hand, they are satisfied with good food" (Ps. 104:27,28).

The reality of food's goodness may be seen in the life of Jesus. He was labeled "a glutton and a drunkard" by His detractors (Matt. 11:19, Lk. 7:34), indicating that He was fond of eating and drinking with His contemporaries. "While the Pharisees and the disciples of John the Baptist fast, the disciples of Jesus eat and drink to celebrate the presence of the Bridegroom" (Bringle 57). On the night before His death, He gathers His disciples to share one final Passover meal with Him, choosing bread and wine to be the lasting sacrament of His death, resurrection, and second coming. After the resurrection, He joins His disciples by the lake to grill fish and break bread. Jesus taught His followers to pray for not only God's kingdom to come, but also for the provision of "our daily bread." Acknowledging the human body's need for food, Jesus not only healed the synagogue official's daughter, but promptly commanded that "something should be given her to eat" (Mark 5:43). "Simple gestures of feeding testify to the graciousness of God--and to the grace-fulness of food (Bringle 58). Moreover, God's provision of "our daily bread" is to serve as a constant reminder of our dependence upon Him as our Source and Provider.

Just as the Bible begins with the imagery of food, so it concludes. And with its conclusion comes a marvelous restorative correction to food's misuse in Genesis. The book of Revelation concludes with the scene of the "marriage supper of the Lamb," where the exalted Christ serves as host of the eschatological

banquet. There His faithful will be fed and nourished for all eternity.

In the feeding of our physical hunger, the child of God should be aware of a deeper spiritual reality: it is not enough to feed and nourish the body; the soul must also be nourished. How often does one give attention to the former, but neglect the latter? How often does one attempt to satisfy spiritual hunger by partaking (often to excess) of food and drink? How often does one fill the stomach, while the heart remains empty, and temporarily silenced by physical satisfaction and satiation? Through the prophet Isaiah God addressed this universal human tendency:

> Ho! Every one who thirsts, come to the waters; and you who have no money come, buy and eat. Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Why do you spend money for what is not bread, and your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, and delight yourself in abundance" (Is. 55:1-2).

God invites His people to delight in abundance (KJV: "fatness")--an abundance of spiritual wealth that nourishes and satisfies. Reiterating this theme, Jesus, after feeding the five thousand, reminds the multitudes that "Moses has given you the bread out of heaven, but it is My Father who gives you the true bread out of heaven" (John 6:32). Then Jesus makes the arresting claim: "I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me shall not hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst" (John 6:35). Our deepest hunger and thirst is not physical, Jesus says, but is spiritual. It is a hunger of soul that He alone can fully satisfy. This truth became very real to me in the context of ministering to (and learning from) one of my parishioners.

Background for the Study

In March of 1997 I received a telephone call from a parishioner, Marianne Gum, asking if she might set up an appointment to discuss something with me that was "very important" to her, something which had brought significant spiritual formation and transformation to her life. Several days later we met together in our church's prayer room, and with considerable enthusiasm and emotion she proceeded to tell me her story, a journey of repeated frustration and failure, which found ultimate resolution and fulfillment in what is today the most well-known and widely implemented Christian weight-loss program in the American Church. Her words, recorded verbatim (with her expressed permission) are as follows:

> I had struggled with a weight problem all of my life--I used food for everything, except for proper nutrition. I had fought my food addiction since junior high school with diet after diet. I lost and gained . lost and gained with every diet I tried. As I grew spiritually, I realized that what I was doing was not pleasing to God. I came to the place of praying about this problem all the time because it was something between God and me. I knew there had to be an answer, and also knew that dieting was not it.
>
> In the summer of 1995 I decided I would never go on another diet, and had finally given up, feeling hopeless. I felt I would simply be fat the rest of my life. Deep down I knew the root was greed and gluttony--but I had no answer. I can remember at the end of the summer of 1995 I gave up. One day I was at a child's birthday party, and a friend came up saying she had been attending "this class." She was very bold, and told me the concept of this program, and shared a verse of scripture with me. A light came on inside me. I felt the Holy Spirit did an immediate work in me; it was a Sunday afternoon. The next Thursday I went to the class--it was September of 1995. Immediately I purchased the materials.

> Even though the materials didn't arrive for three weeks, people were copying the materials for me and I was borrowing the teaching tapes. I immediately saw the truth of what I was learning, and felt I had been set free.
>
> Then I had to learn to walk it out, step by step. Every time you learn obedience you fall more in love with The One you're being obedient to. In the first twelve weeks I lost about 25 pounds. There was then an 8-week break, and I started the course again in January. By the spring I had lost 55 pounds. I felt "new" inside and out.

Today Marianne, a wife and mother, is a slender, attractive woman in her late forties who maintains her enthusiasm for and commitment to this program: the "Weigh Down Workshop," based in Nashville, Tennessee. What especially impressed me about Marianne's account was that she did not seem to be describing "another diet" of meticulously monitoring fat and calorie consumption, but a quality of Christian discipleship that emphasized obedience to the lordship of Christ in and over one's life. She emphasized that the Weigh-Down Program had helped her rediscover the person and work of Jesus Christ, and had "enabled me to fall in love with Him once again"--and in that process experience significant weight loss--over fifty-five pounds in less than one year. During her months of losing weight, she ate all the foods she desired (including those with high caloric and fat content), but simply learned to eat less. She spoke compellingly of how the program had helped her distinguish between "head hunger" (a spiritual hunger for God), and stomach hunger (a true physiological need). The program had taught her that when she experienced this "head

hunger," it could be better satisfied in the spiritual food of prayer, meditation, or Bible study than by edible food and the "magnetic pull of the refrigerator."

These words came from a petite, small-framed woman who seemed to radiate spiritual vitality and inner joy. It was difficult to conceive of her battling a weight problem for so many years while confronting the unrelenting frustration of defeat and despair that accompanied that battle. As someone who has never had a weight problem, God, in those few moments, imparted to me a newfound pastoral compassion for people who do. Marianne's story touched a spiritual nerve within me.

Our conversation concluded with Marianne asking if she might begin a twelve-week Weigh Down Workshop in our church that spring. She explained the use of the program's audio and video teaching tapes, the participant's workbook, the format of the weekly sessions, and the mid-week disciplines of prayer, journaling, and reading of Scripture. She emphasized that the principles of the program were not only for people dealing with overeating, but for other food-related addictions (notably bulimia and anorexia), as well as addictions to alcohol, nicotine, narcotics, and gambling. From a pastor's perspective, I found her description as inspirational as it was informative, and we agreed on the class start-up date: March 4, 1997. On that date, eighteen people began the program. As the program began and developed in our church, I learned that we were among thousands of other host churches sponsoring such a ministry. "Weigh Down

workshops are now being hosted by over 10,000 churches and groups nationwide" (Dallas Morning News, 7-19-97, 3G).

After several class sessions, I began to receive positive feedback from class participants--that people were not only losing weight, but growing in discipleship and love for God. As the program neared its completion, I commented to (and complimented) one of the participants on her weight loss. Her response was telling: she was pleased to have lost some twenty pounds, but far more pleased to discover that "the Bible began to speak to me." She went on to say that in learning the cues of "head hunger," she had learned how to feed her soul on God's Word in Scripture, and "found passages speaking to me that I had read many times before, but now had new life and meaning." And all the while, she was eating all the foods she most enjoyed--but simply eating smaller portions as she re-learned what it meant to be full.

After the program ended in late June, Marianne Gum gave me a book by the program's founder and director, Gwen Shamblin, entitled The Weigh Down Diet. Published in March, 1997, "it sold 200,000 copies in the first two months after its March release" (Dallas Morning News, 3G). In August, 1997, it ranked as the number two best-selling book in the Christian market. Having observed the spiritual fruit resulting from the program in our parish, I was eager to read the book.

In its pages I found that Shamblin is a registered dietitian with a master's degree in food and nutrition, and served as a full-time faculty member at the

University of Memphis for five years. She also worked as a nutritionist for the Tennessee Department of Health. She describes her own attempts at weight loss as a teenager and young adult, using traditional diet programs, which she found lead only to "more slavery to food" (23). "Dieting is making the food behave; this program will teach you to behave by bringing your will under the will of God" (31).

> Weigh Down is showing people, on a daily basis, how our God can transform their hearts and minds so that they can rise above the magnetic pull of the refrigerator! Instead of emphasizing the caloric content of food, the Weigh Down Workshop encourages you to focus on your natural, internal hunger control. But more importantly, your focus will be trained to turn toward the will of God as it relates to food. (x)

The Weigh Down founder notes two gaping holes in the human being: the stomach and the heart. Attempting to satisfy spiritual feelings, needs, or desires of the heart, "we often turn to food and overload our stomach with more than it needs" (2). She presents a three-fold solution:

1. Relearn how to feed the stomach only when it is truly hungry.
2. Relearn how to feed or nourish the longing human soul with a relationship with God.
3. Relearn how to recognize the different hunger urges and not confuse them. This refers to psychological (i.e. "spiritual") hunger vs. physiological (i.e. "stomach") hunger. (3)

When these three areas of "relearning" are put into practice, Shamblin teaches, one discovers food intake will slowly decrease.

> The typical weight-loss program suggests losing weight through diet and exercise. We suggest that if you lose the passion for food, the result will be that you eat less food and therefore lose weight permanently. The typical 1950s-1990s approach tried to fix the body

> or the food but did not address the passion. In this program, expect your food *consumption* to go down--anywhere from one-half to two-thirds. (8)

Although the program offers clearly defined--indeed simple--solutions, they are never presented as easy solutions. Rather, the Weigh Down approach emphasizes a progressive journey, one marked by successes as well as setbacks. Using Exodus symbolism, Shamblin likens the program to "leaving Egypt" (116-125) and entering "The Desert of Testing" (115, 139-157). In this desert one learns to focus on God and his will, learning daily obedience, especially in relation to food consumption (171). But the program gives ongoing assurance that there is a "Promised Land" on the other side of the desert: "The Promised Land is a place where you no longer have to think about eating. You have disciplined yourself to submit to hunger and fullness. Submission is second nature . . . . You can now say that you have risen above the magnetic pull of the refrigerator . . . " (280).

The Weigh Down Program does not stand alone in the field of Christian weight reduction programs. Two other organizations figure prominently in the American church today: First Place (based in Houston, TX), a Christian health and diet program sponsored by the Southern Baptist Church, and Step Forward (based in Birmingham, Alabama), modeled after the twelve-step program. The uniqueness of Weigh Down lies in its unparalleled permission (indeed encouragement) for the participant to consume any and all foods--but in small quantities. Suzanne Wollard, a former leader of First Place groups, and current

facilitator of a Weigh Down group, notes that the programs are quite different in philosophy and outlook:

> First Place is an emotional, physical, and spiritual program. It's similar to Weight Watchers. You keep a food diary, you exercise, you do a lot of Bible reading. With Weigh Down, you don't write anything or do any exercise. The big part is learning obedience instead of gluttony. If you see a cookie, you eat it because you're truly hungry, not because you want it. (Dallas Morning Star, 3G)

Gwen Shamblin, the program's founder, offers perhaps the best overview of all: "With Weigh Down you can have your cake and eat it, too; we will simply teach you how to eat only a small part of it!" (video #9). Moderation, self-control, and obedience to God in the power of his Spirit form the heart of the Weigh Down approach.

Context of the Study

This study was conducted between September 2, 1997 and December 16, 1997 in a Weigh Down Workshop being held at Christ the Redeemer Episcopal Church, Montgomery, Alabama. The church is located in a suburban area of Montgomery, in what is the fastest-growing section of the city. Surrounding the church are numerous, attractive middle-class neighborhoods, shopping malls, and major thoroughfares. At the workshop's first gathering twenty-six persons were present, which after several weeks became a settled group of nineteen, consisting of sixteen women and three men. Those who chose not to continue with the program did so because of financial constraints (a registration fee of $103.00), scheduling conflicts, or a decision that the program was not appropriate for their

needs or expectations. The group was facilitated by Marianne Gum. I was present for eleven of the twelve sessions running from September 2 through November 18, 1997; my role was that of observer and low-level participant.

Weekly gatherings followed the national pattern and plan, consisting of the following components: 1. Opening Prayer, 2. The viewing of a 30-40 minute video (Gwen Shamblin teaching), 3. Sharing responses to the video, 4. Sharing personal struggles and/or victories during the previous week, 5. Sharing notes and reflections recorded in the 175-page Workbook (Rising Above; see Appendix F), 6. Closing prayer (in plenary group, or in smaller groups). Gatherings typically lasted from 70-90 minutes each week.

Purpose

The purpose of the proposed research was to identify, measure, and assess the level of spiritual and emotional growth experienced by participants in a twelve-week Weigh Down Workshop program held in a local church setting. In conducting this research, the following questions were answered, insofar as possible:

Research Question #1

What are the changes in participants' weight, level of spiritual well-being (as measured by the Spiritual Well-Being Scale [SWB]), and codependency (as measured by the Spann-Fisher Codependency Scale [SFCS]) at the twelve-week seminar's beginning (week one), at the program's mid-point (week six), at the

program's conclusion (week twelve), and six weeks after the program's conclusion (December 31, 1997)?

Research Question #2

What is the correlation, if any, between weight reduction, one's sense of spiritual well-being, and levels of codependency?

Research Question #3

What is the correlation, if any, between spiritual well-being and levels of codependency and the spiritual disciplines of personal Bible study, prayer/meditation, and journaling?

These questions are raised in light of the overarching hypothesis that subjects participating in a twelve-week Weigh Down Workshop will demonstrate positive changes in their spiritual well-being and levels of codependency; i.e. that one's level of spiritual well-being will increase, while one's level of codependency will decrease. It is also hypothesized that participants will evidence an increase in time devoted to the spiritual disciplines of Bible study, prayer, and journaling.

Definition of Terms

Overweight

This condition is defined as follows, as defined by Brownell and Foreyt (4):

1. Body mass index (BMI) of 25 to 30 kg/m2.
2. Body weight between the upper limit of normal and twenty above that limit.

In this study, the term "overweight" will be used as an adjective, and also at times as a noun, describing a condition of excess weight, as distinct from obesity.

Obesity

As defined by Minirth and Meier, obesity is "an excessive enlargement of the body's total quantity of fat or adipose tissue." Sometimes called "overfatness," obesity begins "when men are more than 120 percent of their ideal body weight or when women are more than 130 percent of their ideal body weight" (Workbook 261). For purposes of this study, this condition, defined as follows, again is outlined by Brownell and Foreyt (4):

1. Body mass index (BMI) above 30kg/m2.
2. Triceps plus subscapular skin fold: 45 mm for males and 69mm for females.
3. Body weight more than 20 percent above the upper limit for height.
4. Body fat 25 percent of body weight in males or 30 percent in females.

Spiritual Well-Being

This is regarded as "a holistic concept of well-being as the integrated functioning of human emotional, physical, cognitive, and spiritual subsystems" (Fitzgerald 16). Ellison postulates a combination of Religious Well-Being and Existential Well-Being, and anchors the term in the biblical concept of shalom as the experience of a person "functioning as God intended, in consonant relationship with Him, with others, and within one's self." Acknowledging that shalom cannot be fully experienced because of the fall (and its accompanying

sin), spiritual well-being can be realized "to the extent that the various subsystems are functioning harmoniously, consistently with the divine design of creation" (Ellison and Smith 36-37). The National Inter-faith Coalition on Aging (1975) has suggested that spiritual well-being is "the affirmation of life in a relationship with God, self, community, and environment that nurtures and celebrates wholeness" (quoted in Ellison 331).

Ellison notes that spiritual well-being may not be the same thing as spiritual health. "Rather it arises from an underlying state of spiritual health and is an expression of it, much like the color of one's complexion and pulse rate are expressions of good health. Spiritual well-being measures may then be seen more like a stethoscope than like the heart itself" ("Conceptualization" 332). Secondly, spiritual well-being does not appear to be equivalent to spiritual maturity, "though we would expect a spiritually mature person to have a very positive sense of well-being." Ellison refers to the "fruit of the Spirit" (Gal. 5:22,23) as an appropriate index for assessing spiritual maturity, and notes that a newly converted Christian may have a heightened sense of spiritual well-being, but be immature spiritually ("Conceptualization" 332).

Spiritual well-being should be viewed on a continuum and seen "as a continuous variable, rather than as dichotomous. It is not a matter of whether or not we have it. Rather it is question of <u>how</u> <u>much</u>, and how we may enhance the degree of spiritual well-being that we have" ("Conceptualization" 332).

Codependency

While no universally agreed-upon definition exists, in this study the term denotes a "psychosocial condition that is manifested through a dysfunctional pattern of relating to others. This pattern is characterized by; extreme focus outside of self, lack of open expression of feelings, and attempts to derive a sense of purpose through relationships" (Spann and Fisher 17). This definition assumes that the patterns of codependency range on a continuum from low degrees to high degrees of codependency. A further discussion of codependency and its distinguishing characteristics follows in the literature review of codependency Chapter 2.

Subjects

The subjects in this study were nineteen self-selected participants in the twelve-week Weigh Down Workshop that was offered at Christ the Redeemer Episcopal Church, Montgomery, Alabama from September 2, 1997 through November 18, 1997. All of those involved enrolled voluntarily, some at the invitation or encouragement of a friend, others by word-of-mouth publicity. All came with the perceived need and desire for weight reduction. Five people involved in the program were members of Christ the Redeemer; fourteen belonged to other area churches. (The program began with twenty-six persons, seven of them leaving the class within the first four weeks, for reasons noted on p. 13.) Self-selected participant ages ranged from late twenties to early seventies, and were from middle to upper-middle class strata of society.

A comparison group of five women in a Christian Twelve-Step program was also used for comparative analysis. This group has been meeting for the past two years. The same questionnaire was distributed to these subjects.

Methodology

This quasi-experimental, time series design utilized two questionnaires: the Spiritual Well-Being Scale and the Spann-Fischer Codependency Scale. The description of methodology is as follows:

O----X----O----X----O----O

This denotes that observations (O) were followed by treatment (X), with the seminar serving as the treatment, and monthly weight measurements, the Spiritual Well-Being Scale (SWBS), and the Spann-Fischer Codependency Scale (SFCS) serving as the observations/measurements. The questionnaires were given to the twenty-six participants (which eventually narrowed to nineteen) on the evening the program began (September 2, 1997), six weeks into the program (October 7, 1997), on the evening of the program's conclusion (November 18, 1997), and six weeks later (December 31, 1997).

Instrumentation

The tools of instrumentation employed in this research were as follows:

The Spiritual Well-Being Scale (SWBS) (Appendix A)

Ellison, in citing the National Inter-faith Coalition on Aging, defines spiritual well-being as "the affirmation of life in a relationship with God, self, community, and environment that nurtures and celebrates wholeness." It suggests

that spiritual well-being involves a religious dimension and a social-psychological component. The instrument consists of twenty responses, using a six-point Likert-type scale for response. In addition to the overall Spiritual Well (SWB) score, two subscales measure Religious Well-Being (RWB) and Existential Well-Being (EWB). "All three scores assume that these are measures of continuous variables rather than dichotomous" (Fitzgerald 20). One weakness noted in the SWBS is its ceiling effect, which may cause some loss in accuracy at the scale's upper-end measurements.

The Spann-Fisher Codependency Scale (SFCS) (Appendix B)

This scale is sixteen-item questionnaire using a six-point Likert-type scale for response to measure codependency. Codependency may be described as "a psychosocial condition that is manifested through a dysfunctional pattern of relating to others. This pattern is characterized by: extreme focus outside of self, lack of open expression of feelings, and, attempts to derive a sense of purpose through relationships" (Spann and Fisher 27).

Independent and Dependent Variables

The independent variable of this research is the twelve-week Weigh Down Workshop Course held September 2-November 18, 1997. The dependent variables are the scale measurements of weight, spiritual well-being, and co-dependency levels, the latter two as reflected in participants' recorded responses on the two instruments. This study attempts to discover the relationship between

the independent variable (the course offered) and the dependent variables (weight loss or gain, spiritual well-being, and codependency levels).

Data Collection

At an introductory meeting to the twelve-week course (held August 19, 1997), the researcher presented to the prospective participants an overview of his intentions for the study. Participants were informed that the study was completely voluntary, and responses would be made anonymously (with social security numbers identifying respondents, instead of personal names.) On the first meeting (September 2, 1997), the first questionnaires were distributed at the beginning of the class, completed by the end of the class, and returned to the researcher. (There was 100 percent participation from all those attending.) The distribution-collection pattern was duplicated on October 6 and November 18. The final questionnaire and cover letter (see Appendix E) was mailed on December 16, 1997; thirteen were received by return mail by December 31, 1997; the remaining six were all received by January 14, 1998.

The questionnaires were given to the five persons in the comparison group in the same time-frame, and were returned on the same day as received. The answers on the questionnaires for both groups provided the raw data necessary for the study.

Delimitations and Generalizability

The study was delimited to the nineteen persons committed to the twelve-week Weigh Down Course at Christ the Redeemer Church, and the five

individuals in the comparison group. The study did not involve other diet plans or programs. It compared the Weigh Down approach to other Christian weight-loss programs, but did not make comparisons with secular programs. The study relied on the person's perceptions in answering questions, and responses could be influenced by mood, life circumstances, etc. at that particular time. Respondents were asked to note on the questionnaire any unusual trauma or life change they were experiencing at the time of responding to the questions. One cannot be certain that respondents answered in total honesty questions regarding their weight and waist measurement. No further data was collected after the December 16, 1997 mailing (one month after the program's official conclusion).

With these delimitations in mind, however, it was hoped that the findings of this study would provide meaningful insight into the effectiveness of the Weigh Down Workshop, as well as suggest possible correlations between weight loss, spiritual and emotional growth, and the spiritual disciplines of Bible reading, prayer, and journaling. At the least, this study should raise helpful questions that could be investigated and answered with further study.

Significance of the Study

An estimated 75 percent of American adults are overweight--from slightly overweight to obese ("War" 4). Coupled with this is a mounting concern in American life and culture to bring weight under control. One need only to turn to the yellow pages in any sizable city to note the reality of this concern reflected in

a growing listing of diet centers and physicians specializing in weight loss. As noted earlier in this chapter the American diet industry is a multi-billion dollar enterprise. The presence of the Weigh Down Workshop is a significant factor in the American church, and gaining momentum weekly. Each week it is estimated that 75-100 new groups are instituted (Shamblin 5). As of June 1997 over 10,000 Weigh Down groups were meeting nationwide and abroad, making it the largest biblically-based weight-loss program in America. On the NBC evening news of November 27, a feature story was aired on the popularity of the Weigh Down Workshop, with commentator Dan Rather noting that the program is now present in 14,000 churches or homes worldwide, an increase of 4000 groups in roughly a six-month period.

What accounts for this unusual growth? Marie Griffith, although skeptical over many aspects of the Christian diet industry, offers valuable insight into the significance of the industry, and the heartfelt needs and aspirations of those who support it:

> The poignant accounts of people who have struggled with overweight merit compassion, not cheap shots. Even where the theology seems highly questionable in its trivialization of the gospel, drowning in bathos, the issues addressed deserve serious reflection. What does it mean to live in a culture that celebrates both thinness and indulgence?
>
> The pain and humiliation at the heart of (overweight issues) signal a powerful despair that ought not to be trivialized, nor should writers simply be indicted for reinforcing the very standards of thinness that gave rise to that despair in the first place. Failing to take their stories seriously, to let them stir us to understanding, intensifies the marginality and shame articulated by their authors, male but especially female; whereas opening our ears to hear them ought to sharpen our

> attentiveness to that same pain in the churches and communities that surround us. ("Promised Land" 451)

Overview of Dissertation

Chapter 2 reviews selected research literature in the fields of weight loss, obesity, and three means of grace: prayer, Bible study, and small groups. Chapter 3 presents the design of the study, delineating the basis for the selection of the particular instruments employed to measure spiritual well-being and codependency. Chapter 4 presents the findings of the study. Chapter 5 summarizes the findings of the study, identifies the study's limitations and generalizability, and proposes additional research possibilities that emerge from the study.

CHAPTER 2

Precedents in the Literature

In the discussion of weight loss from a Christ-centered approach and perspective, several important themes emerge: the social and psychological implications of obesity, the significance and centrality of the small group experience, the historical development of Christ-centered approaches to weight reduction (and the criticism that has accompanied such approaches), and issues of codependency in persons dealing with issues of obesity and overweight.

The Social and Psychological Implications of Obesity in American Culture

Lawyer and medical journalist Michael Fumento notes that Americans as a whole have gained approximately twelve pounds in average weight in the past decade. According to an older definition of obesity, whereby one had to be 20 percent overweight, one-third of all Americans are obese. But on the basis of new medical evidence that any amount over one's ideal weight (calculated by the "Body Mass Index") is unhealthy, almost three-fourths of American adults are too heavy ("War" 4).

Former Surgeon General C. Everett Koop notes, "This is a twenty-five percent increase in six years; we just can't afford to go on like that . . . If I had stayed on longer (in office), I would have launched the same assault on obesity that I did on smoking" (quoted in Fumento 4).

How many Americans are overweight? In 1986 the figure was 59 percent; in 1990, 64 percent; in 1995, 71 percent. According to the World Health Organization, 300,000 Americans die prematurely each year because of obesity. Among lifestyle-related illnesses, only cigarette smoking (an estimated 400,000 deaths) claims a higher toll (qtd. in Fumento, Land 25). But smoking deaths are declining, while obesity deaths will continue to climb as long as obesity does. Citing Bjorntorp and Brodoff, editors of Obesity, Fumento notes that "Americans are the heaviest people in the industrial world (Land 5, citing Bjorntorp and Brodoff, eds. Obesity).

Christian psychologists and counselors Frank Minirth and Paul Meier cite similar figures. "More than 50 percent of Americans are overweight. Obesity is a significant factor in heart disease, stroke, diabetes, bone and joint disease, high blood pressure, and shortened life span (Minirth and Meier 332).

Besides the physical and physiological implications of obesity, significant social factors must be considered. Brownwell notes that "obesity carries a social stigma." This was mostly clearly shown by studies with children and adults who were asked to express a preference for various forms of disability, including obesity. The order of the rating was the same for all groups of children regardless of their sex, socioeconomic status, racial background, or residence in rural or urban communities. In all cases the obese child was liked least (Brownwell and Foreyt 25). When a series of twelve line drawings of lean, normal, and overweight people were shown to 447 adults and children, the normal-weight

figures were viewed as more desirable as friends and were regarded as being happier, smarter, and better looking (Brownwell and Foreyt 36).

Because a lean figure is so valued in women, Drupka and Vener examined the responses of a group of college-age students to a questionnaire to learn their approaches to weight control. Exercise and diet were the preferred methods of weight loss, but the authors learned that over a twelve-month period 27.3 percent of 115 women used over-the-counter agents to achieve weight loss. Obese people were stigmatized to the same degree as prostitutes and embezzlers. College students would prefer to marry cocaine users, ex-mental patients, and divorcees rather than obese individuals (Brownwell and Foreyt 36-37).

Overweight persons are seen as significantly less desirable employees who, compared with others, "are less competent, less productive, non-industrious, disorganized, indecisive, inactive, and less successful" (Laarking and Pines 315-316).

Brownwell concludes: "Excess weight is detrimental to longevity, to health while living, and to some social interactions. Equally important, most of these detrimental effects can be reversed by weight reduction. In summary, one might well say, 'overweight is risking fate'" (44).

The Centrality and Significance of the Small Group

At the heart of the Weigh Down Program is the presence and influence of the weekly small group, whose purpose is two-fold: to inform and to inspire. Throughout the twelve weeks of the program, participants gather weekly for ninety minutes of small group dynamics. A typical gathering consists of three

components: viewing a video (approximately thirty to forty minutes in length, featuring biblical teaching from Director Gwen Shamblin and numerous personal testimonies of weight loss and God's answer to prayer), inter-personal sharing of victories and/or defeats during the week, and the concluding formation of smaller groups of three to four people to share concerns and prayer requests. The small group serves both to inform and to inspire.

Howard Snyder writes that a small group of eight to twelve people meeting together informally in the church or home is the most effective structure for the communication of the gospel in modern "seculurban" society. He argues for the small group as the basic church structure, not primarily because its usefulness has been abundantly demonstrated in recent years but because "of the inherent possibilities of the small group and its essential compatibility with the nature of the church, biblically understood" (139). Without the small group "the church in urban society simply does not experience one of the most basic essentials of the gospel--true, rich, deep Christian soul-fellowship, or koinonia" (Snyder 140). He notes eight advantages of the small group structure: 1. It is flexible; 2. It is mobile; 3. It is inclusive; 4. It is personal; 5. It can grow by division; 6. It can be an effective means of evangelism; 7. It requires a minimum of professional leadership; 8. It is adaptable to the institutional church (Snyder 140-142).

The small group has been rediscovered as a structure for community life by those who consistently participate in it. "I see this emphasis also as necessary and biblical . . . it is my conviction that the koinonia of the Holy Spirit is most likely

to be experienced when Christians meet together informally in small-group fellowships" (Snyder 17,98).

The small group played a vital and dynamic role in the church's life during the first two centuries (note Acts 2:46,47). The use of small groups of one kind or another seems to be a common element in all significant movements of the Holy Spirit throughout church history. Early Pietism was nurtured by the collegio pietatis, or house meetings for prayer, Bible study and discussion (Bloesch 118). "Virtually every major movement of spiritual renewal in the Christian church has been accompanied by a return to the small group and the proliferation of such groups in private homes for Bible study, prayer, and discussion of the faith" (Snyder 164).

In the early days of the great Wesleyan Revival in England two hundred years ago, John Wesley discovered the importance of the small group for his day. He instituted small cell groups--"class meetings" for the spiritual growth of new converts. He soon saw astounding results, and in reply to his critics he wrote:

> Many now happily experienced that Christian fellowship which they had not so much as an idea before. They began to "bear one another's burdens," and naturally to "care for each other." As they had daily a more intimate acquaintance with, so they had a more endeared affection for, each other. (Wesley 254)

The small group was the basic component of the Wesleyan Revival in England, with the proliferation of John Wesley's "class meetings." Small groups undergirded the Holiness Revival that swept America in the last 1800's and led, in part to the modern Pentecostal movement (Synan and Vinson 42). More

significantly, the road to the Reformation was paved with small-group Bible studies. (Reid 62-64). Today, notes Snyder, "the church needs to rediscover what the early Christians found: that small group meetings are something essential to Christian experience and growth" (140).

When a person is drawn into a little circle, devoted to prayer and to deep sharing of spiritual resources, he is well aware that he is welcomed for his own sake (Trueblood 70). Robert Raines writes, "I have watched proportionately more lives genuinely converted in and through small group meetings for prayer, Bible study, and the sharing of life than in the usual organizations and activities of the institutional church" (70).

The majority of people who are not "on the inside" will come into koinonia only in the small group. In such a group, "those who are awakened in a time of grace will be confirmed in decision, encouraged to grow, and enabled to abide in discipline." (Raines 71). Today there is a return to the small-group fellowship within the church, "a medium through which God has evidently chosen to work in powerful and permanent ways to help people start growing and continue to grow in Christ" (Raines 79).

"A new structure of congregational life is called for which makes provision for genuine meeting between persons, a context in which the masks of self-deception and distrust will be maintained only with difficulty and in which men and women will begin to relate to each other at the level of their true humanity in Christ," notes George Webber. Every local church therefore should "make basic

provision for its members to meet in small groups, not as a side light or an option for those who like it, but as a normative part of its life" (121).

> The important point is that the small unit be seen, not as a temporary expedient or special form, but as an essential structure of congregational life in our day. Christian community is not one among a number of other communities, but something more is involved in its nature. It must be the bedrock on which the meaning of other loyalties and commitments is founded. (Webber 123)

Ed Barlow notes, "Small groups are seen increasingly as a vital factor in the renewal of the church. If the modern church is to maintain vitality or deepen its spiritual life, many small companies of committed people will be required who are honest with God and open to each other" (19).. "The small group is a laboratory in Christian experience where serious saints and interested friends meet to explore scripture, pray, and share each other's burdens in a mutual search to know God's will and carry it out" (11). More simply stated, "A small group within the church is a voluntary, intentional gathering of three to twelve people regularly meeting together with the shared goal of mutual Christian edification and fellowship" (McBride 24).

Jesus is pictured as the greatest small group leader in history. McBride asserts that Jesus' involvement in a small group "is the most convincing rationale for why local churches need to seriously consider including groups as an integral part of their congregational lives" (15). Jesus used the small group context to teach and model spiritual knowledge, attitudes, and behavior. "The small group was Jesus' method for leadership training" (17). He concludes: "from the very

beginning, small groups were integral to the church's development and success. The contemporary resurgence of small groups as a tool for renewal and growth is an attempt to enable the church to realize its full potential" (20).

Similarly, Barlow views Jesus as the ultimate authority on small groups. He chose twelve "to be with Him; it was the training of this small group upon which He based his whole hope for the future kingdom" (Barlow 22). Small groups can help people grow in the ability to accept other people unconditionally and at the same time not condone their inappropriate behavior. "The best small group meetings are those where all people feel accepted as they are" (58).

Dietrich Bonhoeffer notes that the goal of all Christian community is to be "bringers of the message of salvation. As such, God permits them to meet together and gives them community" (23).

Such community is reflected in the very nature of God:

> The small group begins with the very nature of God. Genesis 1:1 launches the biblical record with the simple yet profound statement that God (Elohim) is the Creator of all that exists. The word Elohim is plural, designating or incorporating more than one person. Although interpreted as singular throughout the Old Testament, the word expresses the unity of three persons in the one God--the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. (McBride 14)

Robert Wuthnow examines the small group phenomenon from a sociological and cultural perspective. He notes that in 1994, four out of every ten Americans belonged to a small group that met regularly, providing "caring and support for its members." "To overlook the trend of small groups would be a serious mistake, for the small-group movement has been effecting a quiet

revolution in American society. It is adding fuel to the fires of cultural change that have already been lit" ("Transforming" 24).

"According to a recent three-year, Lilly Endowment-funded Gallup study, more adult churchgoers today are involved in Bible studies and self-help groups than in Sunday School" (Bird 25). George Gallup, Jr. links small groups to societal changes, calling the nineties "the Decade of Healing." "Gallup believes such a label is appropriate in view of the millions of Americans who have joined small nurturing and caring groups seeking help for psychological, physical, emotional, or spiritual problems" (qtd. in Bird 26). Fuller Institute Director Carl George notes, "A small group is a place where people have enough reference points socially to find themselves sustained emotionally and spiritually--a context for meeting needs for intimacy and trust" (qtd. in Bird 26).

> Small groups are not only attracting participants on an unprecedented scale; they are also affecting the ways in which we relate to each other and how we view God. Providing people with a stronger sense of community has been a key aim of the small-group movement from its inception. With community breaking down in culture, "the solution thus is to start intentional groups of like-minded individuals who can regain a sense of community. These communities are fluid and more concerned with the emotional states of the individual. They reflect the fluidity of our lives by allowing us to bond simply but to break our attachments with equivalent ease. (Wuthnow, "Transforming" 22)

Wuthnow notes that these groups seldom study religious history or formal theological statements. Rather, they discuss small portions of religious texts with an eye toward discovering how these texts apply to their personal lives. "Personal testimonies carry enormous weight in such discussions . . . ." The small group

movement is now poised to exercise even greater influence on American society in the next decade than it has in the past two decades ("Transforming" 24).

Wuthnow enumerates that the primary reasons for joining a small group: (1) a desire to grow and mature as a person, (2) a personal invitation from a personal friend or acquaintance, (3) a desire to become more disciplined in the spiritual life, (4) hearing about it through church or synagogue, (5) being in another similar group previously, (6) needing emotional support, and (7) having problems in personal life, experiencing a crisis in life, or having a sense of isolation in the community (Wuthnow 84). He describes five kinds of groups: Discussion groups, support groups, special interest groups, prayer fellowships, Bible Study groups (Journey 65).

Those seeking a small group experience often see themselves as embarking on a spiritual journey. Wuthnow identifies two essential quests: a quest for spirituality and a quest for community. "Certainly, the yearning for community is one of the significant forces behind the recent rise of the small-group movement." (Journey 33-36).

Inner-personal growth is often attested to as a result of belonging to a small group. The five most prominent of such growth are: feeling better about oneself, achieving more open and honest communication with others, facing repressed emotions or feelings, finding a deeper love and appreciation for other people, and an increased ability to forgive others (Journey 229).

Christ-Centered Approaches to Weight Reduction: A History

Since the mid 1950's American Christianity has seen the rise (and sometimes fall) of groups and concepts like Overeaters Victorious, Believercise, Faithfully Fit, and the Love Hunger Action Plan. An overview follows of the significant literature and accompanying organizations dedicated to weight loss from a Christ-centered perspective that have emerged over the past forty-odd years.

The year 1957 heralded the first book promoting weight loss from a strongly biblical, Christ-centered approach. Pray Your Weight Away, authored by Presbyterian minister Charlie Shedd, blended the tone of down-home preacher with the shrewdness of an entrepreneurial fitness broker in order to peddle the gospel of slimness, condemning portly bodies in the light of sin and guilt, while touting born-again reduction through sustained and humble prayer. Shedd, who claimed to have shed 120 pounds from his own body, recommends various treatments for successful slimming, including vocal mealtime affirmations such as: "Today my body belongs to God. Today I live for Him. Today I eat with Him" (37).

He also advises, as a useful time-saver, combining daily devotions with fifteen minutes of calisthenics and encourages readers to follow his own regimen, which included executing karate kicks while reciting the third chapter of Proverbs and timing sit-ups to the spoken rhythm of Psalm 19. With a heavy dose of positive thinking to balance his rebuke of excess poundage, Shedd assured readers

that beneath their bulk "there is a beautiful figure waiting to come forth. Peel off the layers, watch it emerge, and know the thrill which comes when you meet the real you" (58). Moreover, "When God first dreamed you into creation, there weren't one hundred pounds of excess avoirdupois hanging around your belt" (67). "We fatties are the only people on earth who can weigh our sin" (92). (It should be noted that Shedd's equation of fat with sin has, in the more current literature, come to be regarded as "bondage to food," or lack of self control, not an ungodly yielding to sin.)

Commenting on Shedd's seminal book, R. Marie Griffith notes:

> Shedd and his readers could hardly have foreseen the impending explosion of Christian diet literature into a multimillion-dollar industry, one that rode the back of the American diet craze and capitalized on it by creating a message specially geared to the evangelical multitudes. Today the shelves of Christian bookstores bulge with material that makes Charlie Shedd look like a prophetic sage (even if he did recommend only a trifling 15 minutes of exercise per day) rather than an object of easy derision. ("Promised Land" 448)

In 1960, Episcopalian Deborah Pierce, transformed from a 210-pound object of campus ridicule to a "high fashion model" in Washington, wrote I Prayed Myself Slim, to be followed by pastor Victor Kane's Devotions for Dieters, published in 1967, reprinted in 1973 and again in 1976 ("Promised Land" 449).

Christian diet literature underwent its initial boom in the early 1970's, with Charlie Shedd continuing to lead the way with his 1972 book, The Fat Is in Your Head. It remained on the national religious best-seller list for twenty-three months and sold more than 110,000 copies by 1976. Charismatic conference

speaker Frances Hunter produced God's Answer to Fat in 1975, a top religious best-seller that far exceeded even Shedd's numbers, "with 1977 sales figures nearly matching Charles Colson's Born Again and the inspirational autobiography Joni ("Promised Land" 449). Hunter regards food as an addiction, not so much a source of sinful greed and gluttony. "I want to tell you that I am a 'foodaholic' and I have always been and I will always be, but with God's help, this 'foodaholic' is going to let Jesus control her appetite from now on!" (22).

"Other notable successes in this decade included C.S. Lovett's Help, Lord - The Devil Wants Me Fat! (1977), Patricia Kreml's Slim for Him (1978) and Neva Coyle's Free to Be Thin (1979), which sold more than 500,000 copies and spawned a virtual industry of Coyle-authored diet products, including an exercise video and an inspirational low-calorie cookbook" ("Promised Land" 449).

Kreml warns her readers against vanity and self-focus, even while assuring them that they will become more physically attractive via her program.

> We don't diet, lose weight, and firm our bodies just so we can look nice and get compliments. This will be a result of our efforts, but not the main reason for them. Our first reason has to be keeping our bodies under subjection that we might live the temperate Christ-like life we are called to live. Keeping the body under subjection is not mere self-denial, but sacrificial obedience to God. (72)

In the format of a daily spiritual guide, with 150 brief devotional thoughts, Scripture verses, and prayers of affirmation and repentance, Kreml gives advice on various subjects related to weight control connecting overeating to Eve's consumption of the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden. That losing weight is

the will of God is made explicit: one is "slim not for oneself but rather for Him" (23). Significant focus is given to satanic warfare against the dieter, but ultimate victory is assured in Christ: "We are to command and rule Satan, not vice versa. He cannot lay fat, gluttony, or greed on us because we don't have to take it. All we need to take is authority over the enemy and command him to leave in Jesus' name, and he has to go" (163). More positively, "The Lord is doing a mighty work in the area of diet and eating habits, to set His people free by teaching them who they are in Him and what their rights and responsibilities are as His children" (ix). Kreml's rhetoric is unequaled in its skillful portrayal of Satan luring well-intentioned Christians unto debauched eating patterns, and she deftly importunes readers to shun demonic temptations in order to 'keep your mind and heart facing the Promised Land of weight loss'" (Bringle 144).

In 1979 Neva Coyle and Marie Chapian published Free to Be Thin, which was revised in 1993. In the first edition, they combined "a therapeutic emphasis on overeating as a 'compulsive act' and a sign of 'psychoneurosis' with a theological emphasis on overeating as sin" (Bringle 148). In the revision, however, the emphasis is significantly more on gaining victory as one's spiritual inheritance. A particularly rousing motivational passage suggests: "Think of your "promised land" as a thin body. You can enter your promised land and enjoy the fullness of life that God gives to those who are obedient, or you can forfeit it" (91). Motivational "self-talk" is prevalent in this regimen:

> You will no longer live to yourself. Please say these words out loud: I obey the Lord. I chose to obey the Lord; I am a person of obedience. Following the Lord is not penance. Change is not punishment. Health is a blessing. Lack of exercise robs energy. I will obey the Lord. I will not defile my body. Absent-minded eating defiles. (122)

"Just as Kreml in Slim for Him transposes the Biblical land of Canaan into 'the Promised Land of weight-loss,' Coyle and Chapian liken thinness to para-disaical bliss and redemption" (Bringle 148).

Christians who had failed to lose weight on their own took a cue from the strategy of secular weight-loss programs (TOPS: Taking Off Pounds Sensibly [1949], Overeaters Anonymous [1960], and Weight Watchers [1963], and began seeking help from other struggling dieters, adding a biblical dimension to the program. The wife of a New York Presbyterian pastor, for instance, gave up the strict regimen of Weight Watchers in 1972 to form 3D (Diet, Discipline, Discipleship), advertised as "a Christian counterpart to national weight-watcher programs" and expanded to more than 5000 churches and 100,000 participants by 1981. (This group is no longer extant.) Also in the mid-1970's, Neva Coyle (weighing 248 pounds), having failed at every commercial diet program she tried, turned to the Bible, lost 100 pounds, and founded Overeaters Victorious in 1977, thereby launching her career ("Promised Land" 449).

The trend hardly faltered in the 1980s and '90s. The recent plethora of publications includes books on "spiritual discipline for weight control," "biblical principles that will improve your health," and achieving "greater health God's way." More Christian diet groups have emerged and spread nationally, including

Houston-based "First Place," and smaller programs such as "Jesus is the Weigh" ("Promised Land" 449).

As the nation's second-largest Christian weight-loss program, some attention must go to "First Place," based in Houston, Texas. The program began in 1981 in Houston's First Baptist Church under the direction of Dottie Brewer, who was succeeded by Carole Lewis in 1987. Today it remains under the auspices of the Baptist Sunday School Board, and is being used in "every state in the United States and many foreign countries" (Lewis 17).

The core value of the program is to live a life of balance--mentally, physically, emotionally. "Only in retraining our emotions are we going to find wholeness. Only through God's Word will that wholeness come to us. We can expect life and peace as we choose balance in the mental, physical, spiritual and emotional areas of our lives" (Lewis 23).

It offers a ten-week course, stressing the "Nine Commandments," all based on the nine personal choices and commitments of attendance, prayer, Scripture reading, Scripture memorization, Bible study, proper eating, accountability, (completing the daily "Fact Sheets"), outreach to others (daily phone calls), and exercise at least three times a week. The First Place Program has grown from "twelve people in Houston's First Baptist Church to thousands of participants in 10,000 churches in every state" (Lewis 4).

The Weigh Down Workshop

As impressive, though, as this growth is in the First Place Program, it cannot keep apace with the more popular (and ever-increasing) trends of the Weigh Down Program, the largest Christian weight-loss program in the world. As of February, 1998, Shamblin's book, "The Weigh Down Diet" had sold more than 400,000 copies worldwide, and acclaimed by Doubleday Publishers Vice President Eric Major as "a wonderful and amazing phenomenon." Major continues: "Gwen Shamblin is a most astonishing woman; she understands the theology she's putting forward and the marketing techniques she needs to do it" (qtd. in Hill 8W). Weigh Down is headquartered in Franklin, Tennessee in a 22,000 square-foot office building which will soon be doubled in size to 44,000 square feet. More than 800 educational and information packages are shipped daily from the headquarters (Hill 1W).

Writing in March 1997, Marie Griffith noted:

> Currently the largest of these programs is the Tennessee-based Weigh Down Workshop (founded in 1986), a twelve-week Bible study program that is now offered in as many as 10,000 churches in the US and overseas. That program is likely to gain new ground with the recent release of founder Gwen Shamblin's The Weigh Down Diet, stocked at both commercial and religious bookstores across the nation. Bible-based diet programs are expanding rapidly, with no ebb in sight. ("Promised Land" 449)

Griffith's words may well have been prophetic in nature, for at the end of 1997, the Weigh Down Workshop found itself featured on the NBC Evening News (November 27, 1997) as the new "diet fad" of the nation, with Gwen

Shamblin being interviewed by Dan Rather. The organization estimates that some 14,000 groups now meet weekly in churches and homes nationwide.

One may well ask what accounts for the phenomenal success of the Weigh Down Program. Perhaps the answer lies in its common-sense simplicity (which must always be carefully distinguished from ease): "God does not care what we eat. What God does care about is how much we eat" (35). The fundamental principle of the Weigh Down Program is the consumption of food in small quantities--giving the body only what it actually needs, not what it wants. This discipline might best be termed "modified abstinence." In virtually every other Christian approach reviewed in this chapter, detailed and meticulous menus and recipes are offered to the reader (and often required to achieve success). In addition, exercise is typically suggested or required. In the Weigh Down approach, there is literally no "taboo" food, and no required exercise. In fact, Shamblin cautions that heavy exercise will only trigger greater physiological hunger, which must be met. Any food may be eaten at any time, with two qualifiers: one, the eater is experiencing true physiological hunger that should be fed, and two, the eater consumes just enough to "find fullness"--a "polite, satisfied feeling" (61). Fullness is never defined in terms of feeling "stuffed" or uncomfortably full.

Obviously, there is nothing new or innovative to this approach of careful discipline and moderation. Twenty years ago secular author George Christians wrote:

> The key to overweight is abstinence. Abstinence is not a diet. It is a plan for living with food. Abstinence is eating three pre-planned, nourishing meals a day (nourishing for you) with no snacks in between meals, no eating of former binge foods, and nothing outside these three meals except low-cal or no-cal beverages. Abstinence is a radical redesign of your life. (80)

Christians outlines seven key steps in his regimen, including the admission to oneself and those "nearest you that you are a compulsive overeater" and that as you learn to eat "normally as thin people eat and exercise as much as they, you will eventually be a normal thin person" (95-97).

Having surveyed the history of Christ-centered/biblical approaches to dieting, the following provides an overview of each program or plan discussed, with its essential features noted. (Also included is the Minirth-Meyer approach, described on pages ----, and annotated below as "M-M.")

Noteworthy Christian Diet Plans: A Summary

	Proponent-Founder of Plan									
	Shedd	Pierce	Kane	Hunter	Kreml	Coyle	Haye (3-D)	M-M	Lewis (1st Place)	Shamblin (Weigh Dn.)
Components										
Book(s)	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x
Weekly sm.group mtgs. w/ leader							x	x	x	x
Video Tapes (in class)										x
Audio Tapes (take-home)										x
Daily Devotions					x		x	x	x	x
Workbook provided							x	x	x	x
Monthly Newsletter									x	x
Proscribed Diet Plan; Calorie Counting, Food Exchanges, etc.	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Low-Cal Recipes			x	x			x	x	x	
Regular Exercise	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	

Criticism of the Christian Diet Industry

Clearly the Christian approach to weight loss is not without its critics. Entering the world of Women's Aglow Fellowship, Marie Griffith, in her recent book, God's Daughters, presents an objective look at the history, values, and teachings of this charismatic women's fellowship. She notes that from its inception to the present, a prominent theme in Aglow has been concern over weight loss and bodily control, "for the sake of beauty perhaps even more than health." Within evangelical culture, she finds that eating and dieting become "deeply religious issues for Aglow participants and other religious women as well" (Daughters 141). From a feminist perspective, the endless discussions of "food and fat almost beg to be interpreted as a kind of internalized oppression, in which social prescriptions and taboos pertaining to weight are given divine sanction, and even origin" (149).

R. Lawrence Moore in Selling God dismisses the Christian diet industry and accompanying books as "merchandise in questionable taste" and lumps them with "love-making manuals" and cheap literature. "The decade of the 1980s produced a flourishing market in Bible-based diet books (More of Jesus, Less of Me), love-making manuals, jogging and exercise books, and the Christian equivalents of harlequin romances." He goes on to lament that all Christian bookstores have greatly expanded their stock of "Christian goods," including books in the flourishing diet industry (254).

In Fit Bodies, Fat Minds, Os Guiness writes that concern for dieting is evidence of the anti-intellectual concern of the "slim, svelte, and tanned . . . striking blond in her twenties" who is too lazy or too foolish to care about the life of the mind (90). Similarly in Mary Louise Bringle's The God of Thinness, the author denounces the Christian diet industry for "feeding off the facile conflation of fat and sin (and forgetting that the traditional teachings of the church condemn consumptive behaviors, but says nothing about cosmetic matters of body shape and size)." The god of thinness, in her estimation, is a profound theological distortion that worships the form of the creature rather than the reality of the Creator. Her succinct summation is telling: "Thinness is a false god. Fatness is a pseudo-sin" (102). Bringle finds Americans' preoccupation with overweight excessive, especially as it touches adolescent and pre-adolescent children: "A Gallup Poll conducted in the mid 1980's discovered that 41percent of nonwhites thought of themselves as overweight. A 1986 study in the San Francisco and Chicago areas found that from 50 to 80 percent of fourth grade girls were on diets" (24).

Coining the term "weightism" as the judgmental attitude of so-called "thin" people toward the overweight she writes with considerable passion:

> Does weightism rather constitute a serious sin--in fact a sin against neighbor, against God, and against me? "Sin" is a sharp word, a strong word; yet, I find it a sadly appropriate word to describe weightist actions and attitudes from the vantage point of Christian moral theology . . It seems both wrong-headed and hurtful to make judgments about others based solely on appearances - whether such judgments assume a facile equation between fatness and gluttony, or fatness and incompetence, or fatness and

> "unlikability." If sin lies in any act that violates the love of neighbor, then weightism manifests a painful example of sinfulness. (114)

In a similar vein, Virginia Mollenkott, writing for The Other Side, presents an impassioned account, biographically, of her struggle with obesity in her essay, "The Oppression of Fat Folks." "You see," she candidly writes, "I was a fat baby--thirteen and one-half pounds at birth, and gaining all the way." As a child and adolescent, she claims to have eaten "almost nothing, and stayed fat" (36). All attempts at numerous diet plans failed, including calorie intakes nearing starvation levels, until she finally found a diet of few carbohydrates and almost unlimited proteins and fats. "Over a period of several years, I lost 85 pounds" (38). Mollenkott's narrative highlights the oppressive judgments of society, and her justified frustration with "easy diet plans" and evangelical pronouncements of her lack of submission to the will of God in her life. To the admittedly simplistic answers of programs such as Weigh Down and First Place, Mollenkott issues an important challenge: "I must not force my behavior patterns on others. There is not just one cause of overweight; there are many" (40).

Marie Griffith pleads for compassion and empathy for people battling issues of overweight, even those "whose obsession with weight has become a curse, an endless source of self-recrimination and spiritual insecurity" (454). Bringle shares her pain: "I see myself in the overstocked kitchen, stuffing down every delicacy I sight as I try to satiate my urgent hunger: a hunger that stretches toward

a source of fulfillment which lies ultimately outside my control; a hunger that no food can ever truly satisfy" (41). Griffith writes:

> The empathy that I am calling for certainly does not preclude critique of Christian diet and fitness books. My own feelings toward the genre remain ambivalent at best. I am persuaded, however, that recent programs like First Place and the Weigh Down Workshop are at least more sensible than their forebears. Whatever our final assessment, we ought to be able to separate the trivial and sometimes truly ridiculous from what is potentially worthwhile in this literature: the affirmation of embodiment, the recognition of suffering, the hopeful quest for healing, and the special attentiveness to women's lives and stories. (454)

She is well aware that more than a few church people, conservative and liberal, continue to scorn those who relish the earnest, homespun approach of Charlie Shedd, Neva Coyle, and Gwen Shamblin--"those who pray feelingly about issues that may not seem to the rest of us to be on God's top list of concerns. But to dismiss Bible-based diet books for their shallowness is to ignore the pain and spiritual struggle behind them" ("Promised Land" 449). Griffith's response strikes a helpful and needed balance in the Christian diet industry's arena. While much of the literature does border on the frivolous and faddish, its very existence signals a deeper human pain and problem which some authors have thoughtfully addressed.

The Codependency Construct: Basic Assumptions and Critiques

The term "codependent" or "coalcoholic" was originally defined in the late 1970s and early 1980s to help families and spouses of individuals with alcohol and drug-related problems. Mostly in line with family systems ideas, the model addressed the family members, especially wives, who "interfered" with the

recovery. It was suggested that the codependent's behavior encouraged, or at least enabled, the addict to continue drinking or using drugs. A wide range of literature dealing with codependency has emerged over the past fifteen years. Robert Westermeyer notes the three "most popular" books on the subject: Facing Codependency, by Pia Mellody; Codependent No More, by Melody Beattie, and Codependency: Misunderstood, Mistreated, by Anne Wilson Schaef. It is Westermeyer's understanding that "the majority of people who consider themselves versed in the codependency arena gained at least some of their knowledge from one or more of these three books" (339).

The authors' conceptualizations may be summarized as follows: Codependency is a progressive disease brought about by child abuse, which takes the form of anything "less than nurturing;" codependency is epidemic (seemingly touching, in some form or degree, nearly every segment of Western culture), and is manifested in a vast array of psychological and physical symptoms. The (usually-exaggerated) caring manifested by codependents is an unconscious effort to keep repressed pain at bay, while the codependent actually contributes to the addictive behavior of their loved ones by enabling. Enabling keeps the loved one addicted so the codependent can continue caring to gain a sense of self-worth. Recovery from codependency requires drastic attitude and lifestyle change (usually detachment) and a lifelong commitment to the twelve-step regime. All three authors assert that codependency is a lifelong illness which does not go away; rather (at best) it moves into remission.

Beattie defines codependency in interpersonal terms: "a codependent person is one who has let another person's behavior affect him or her, and who is obsessed with controlling that person's behavior" (31). She also emphasizes that "codependency is primarily a reactionary process." By this she means that codependent individuals react to the "problems, pains, lives, and behaviors" of themselves and others, instead of acting in ways that are adaptive (33). According to Beattie, although the recovery process is complex, progressive, and grueling, it is also "fun." She writes, "Recovery is not only fun, it is simple," based on the premise that each person is responsible for him- or herself (54). Among the other authors in the field of codependency literature, the following are exemplary in the models and constructs they posit:

Subby has combined a family systems approach with ego psychology in his effort to define codependency. He defines this condition as:

> an emotional, psychological, and behavioral condition that develops as a result of an individual's prolonged exposure to, and practice of, a set of oppressive rules - rules which prevent the open expression of feelings, as well as the direct discussion of personal and interpersonal problems.

Adherence to these dysfunctional rules leads to identity disturbances within family members. Codependency results when family members invest more psychological energy in their false self than in their true self. Once this occurs, codependent patterns will be perpetuated, not only in the family, but in relationships outside the family as well (26-35).

Larsen defines codependency as consisting of "those self-defeating, learned behaviors that diminish our capacity to initiate or participate in loving relationships" (14). He emphasizes both behavioral and interpersonal aspects of codependency and the role that social learning plays in the development of the codependent condition. According to Larsen, codependent individuals suffer from deficits in the skills necessary for developing and maintaining healthy relationships (32).

Whitfield defines codependency as "any suffering and/or dysfunction that is associated with or results from focusing on the needs and behaviors of others" (Child, 19). Following Beattie's model, he emphasizes the interpersonal aspects of codependency. The codependent person "looks elsewhere," believing that something outside of ourselves --the True Self--can give us happiness and fulfillment. For Whitfield, the "elsewhere" may be people, places, things, behaviors, or experiences. "Wherever it is, we may neglect our own selves for it." The result is a hiding of the True Self, in order to please authority figures, and a codependent False Self emerges, one to whom we habitually look. This looking to the False Self becomes an addiction: "the addiction to looking elsewhere" (Condition, 4,5).

Schaef provides a broad definition of codependency that posits the existence of an underlying addictive process that gives rise to codependent behavior. Codependency "is a disease that has many forms and expressions and that grows out of a disease process that is inherent in the system in which we live." This

disease is the "addictive process," defining addiction broadly as "any substance or process we feel we have to lie about" (21). Manifestations of the addictive process include chemical dependency, sexual addictions, eating and food disorders, personality disorders, as well as codependency.

Wegscheider-Cruse provides one of the more operational definitions of codependency, describing it as a specific condition that is characterized by preoccupation and extreme dependency on a person or object, including food. "Eventually, this dependence on another person becomes a pathological condition that affects the codependent in all relationships" (2).

In the field of biblically-based literature, Nancy Groom offers the following helpful and comprehensive definition of codependency:

> Codependency is a self-focused way of life in which a person, blind to his or her true self, continually reacts to others--being controlled by and seeking to control their behavior, attitudes, and/or opinions, resulting in spiritual sterility, loss of authenticity, and absence of intimacy. (21)

While much of the codependency construct has much to commend it, words of caution have been voiced in the past several years regarding basic assumptions and presuppositions inherent to the codependency model. Myer, Peterson, and Rosales, for example, call three underlying assumptions into serious question: 1. that codependency is a disease, 2. that codependency is an addiction, and 3. that codependency is largely predetermined by the environment. They argue that "assumptions underlying codependency are fraught with problems, and therefore codependency as a diagnostic category is not as universally valid as is popularly

held" (449-450). Noting the "Barnum effect," where any description of a disorder is so general and highly probable that anyone can fall under its label, they argue that "efforts to identify codependency as an addiction and disease should be redirected." Widely held assumptions, they assert, "risk disservice to the very clients we seek to assist" (457).

Similarly, Robert Westermeyer voices two concerns with the codependency model: 1. The codependency model pathologizes the natural (and altruistic) tendency to care for others, and 2. the proposed remedies for codependency "mandate action which is not necessarily in line with prosocial values" (342). These criticisms are shared by Wendy Kaminer who writes:

> The trouble is that for codependency consumers, someone else is always writing the script. They are encouraged to see themselves as victims of family life rather than self-determining participants. They are encouraged to believe in the impossibility of individual autonomy (13).

Westermeyer's other criticisms of the codependency model are that it allows one to relinquish responsibility for our frustrating lifestyles, and that a codependency label may simply afford "license to be more selfish" through unwarranted detachment. Critiquing the codependent writers, he believes that "Melody Beattie's idea that relationships should always be equitable reflects the temperament of a five-year old" and that Anne Schaef is reckless in her articulation that "mental health practitioners are, by definition, codependent themselves" (344).

O'Brien and Gaborit, in their 1992 study of the relationship between codependency, chemical addiction, and depression, noted Schaef's hypothesis that codependency is a disorder suffered by society at large, and that instead of being an exception, it is the norm. They conclude, "Because a wide variety of common behaviors can be labeled codependent, there is a need for criteria that will determine when the behaviors are so momentous as to be called a disorder" (134).

The Relationship Between Codependency and Overeating

Studies of overweight or obese individuals have consistently revealed a correlation between their physical condition and deep-seated emotional needs. Denis Craddock writes:

> In my experience of following over 350 cases of obesity and assessing 28 obese controls, those who need to eat as compensation for lack of love in their lives form a large and important group. Eating helps to keep them stable. Three main groups of individuals seem to find compensation in eating, which may be the major or only pleasure in their lives:
>
> 1. Children lacking love from one or both parents
> 2. Single individuals or married couples with no children.
> 3. Unhappy individuals living in a state of stress and lack of general affection. (58)

Beattie notes that one of the primary manifestations of codependency may be found in an eating disorder--overeating or undereating (45). Similarly, in her 1994 study ("Codependency as a Mediator Between Stressful Events and Eating Disorders,") of ninety-five undergraduate women, Dinah Meyer found that women assessed as codependent exhibited more eating disorder symptoms than non-codependent participants, and "were more likely to display the thoughts and

behaviors common to eating disorders" (i.e. bulimia or anorexia) (113). Furthermore, the findings suggested "a developmental sequence, whereby codependency mediates the relationship between excessive stress and the development of an eating disorder" (107).

In their landmark book Love Hunger, authors Frank Minirth and Paul Meier use a sound combination of psychology and spirituality to address food addiction and overweight, and note, "We find codependent relationships in almost all cases of eating compulsion" (112). They address psychological and emotional factors with depth and precision, believing that "most diet plans fail because underlying emotional issues are not resolved" (333). The book's purpose is to enable the practitioner to identify and resolve those issues. The authors believe the problem of overeating must be addressed from a broad spectrum--physical, psychological, and spiritual. This comprehensive program is used by patients in the Minirth-Meier Clinics in four states to break permanently patients' addiction to food. The program is based on the premise that overeating is linked to emotional and spiritual deprivation, not just physical cravings. It begins with a relationship inventory that helps the patient understand how disappointments with family-of-origin, spouse, authority figures, or with food itself can lead to compulsive overeating.

The authors cite twelve common reasons for compulsive eating, including cultural pressures, an attempt to avoid love and intimacy, food as a tranquilizer,

self-punishment, and a need to control one's circumstances and/or environment (20-32).

The regimen sets forth a dietitian-designed food plan with daily menus, food substitution suggestions, and numerous recipes. In addition, its strategies for addressing relapses, maintenance, motivation, and sound psychology make it a holistic approach to weight loss.

The program enables the participant to identify issues of denial and then to understand the addiction cycle: love hunger, low self-esteem, addictive agent (food as anesthetic), consequences (obesity), guilt/shame, self-hatred. Then a "readiness inventory" is presented with ten paths to recovery including identification of all addictions, a confrontation of denial, an awareness of "trigger foods and situations," adequate family support, right motives, reasonable goals, medical approval, and a commitment to change and spiritual growth.

"We find codependent relationships in almost all cases of eating compulsion. A codependent relationship is one in which people are overly dependent on one another and often swing between extremes of dependence and independence" (112). They note further . .

> The opposite of codependency is not independence, but healthy interdependence. Balanced, interdependent persons can be both dependent enough to allow trusting vulnerability and genuine intimacy in a relationship and yet at the same time be independent enough that they have their own emotional identity. They do not go up or down emotionally just because others go up and down. (114)

The authors recommend the writing out of "new decisions," (138-140), and recording a tape of positive "self-talk" statements for ongoing reflection and meditation (145, 146). In addition, one must learn to face and embrace the pain of the past, especially issues of childhood. One must "grieve out the pain." "We often tell patients to think of peeling the layers off an onion as they try to get to the core of their pain. They must peel through layers of anger, depression, and sadness" (126). Issues of shock and denial, anger, bargaining, and true grief are all examined in considerable depth, concluding with acceptance, forgiveness, and resolution (118-134). "The adult cannot be healthy if the child from whom he grew (and who remains within) is still in pain. You may need to make the decision: I will be a good parent to the child within me. One must not withhold permission for inner healing. Positive decisions must be made; I deserve to be healthy. God wants me to be healthy. I can be healthy" (137).

In The Love Hunger Weight-Loss Workbook, a complementary workbook to the original manual, a multifaceted approach to develop and maintain long-term lifechange is offered. This twelve-week course addresses issues of the body, mind, and soul. For the body, the authors provide weekly eating, exercise, and lifestyle plans to insure successful dieting and weight maintenance, including menus and weight-loss charts. For the mind there is a self-examination of love hunger through self tests, journaling, interactive questions, and exercises to help the reader explore the underlying thoughts and feelings that lead to overeating.

For the soul there are daily meditations based on the twelve-step recovery program, one step for each of the program's twelve weeks.

Summary

In this chapter we have examined the pertinent literature in the field of Christian approaches to dieting and weight loss, with particular focus given to the social and psychological implications of obesity in American culture, the vital roles of small groups in providing needed spiritual and emotional support, the history of Christian organizations and philosophies dedicated to weight reduction (with special attention given to the Weigh Down Program), their accompanying critics, basic assumptions and criticisms of the codependency model, and the relationship between codependency and overeating.

CHAPTER 3

Design of the Study

Purpose

Having noted the mounting concern over weight control and weight loss, both in the contemporary culture and in the American church, the purpose of the proposed research was to identify, measure, and assess the level of spiritual and emotional growth as experienced by participants in a twelve-week Weigh Down Workshop program held in a local church setting.

Research Questions

Research Question #1

What are the changes in participants' weight, level of spiritual well-being (as measured by the Spiritual Well Scale [SWB]), and codependency (as measured by the Spann-Fisher Codependency Scale [SFCS]) at the twelve-week seminar's beginning (week one), at the program's mid-point (week six), at the program's conclusion (week twelve), and six weeks after the program's conclusion (December 31, 1997)?

Research Question #2

What is the correlation, if any, between weight reduction, one's sense of spiritual well-being, and levels of codependency?

Research Question #3

What is the correlation, if any, between spiritual well-being and levels of codependency and the spiritual disciplines of personal Bible study, prayer/meditation, and journaling?

These questions are raised in light of the overarching hypothesis that subjects participating in a twelve-week Weigh Down Workshop will demonstrate positive changes in their spiritual well-being and levels of codependency; i.e. that one's level of spiritual well-being will increase, while one's level of codependency will decrease as a result of participating in the Weigh Down program. It is also hypothesized that participants will evidence an increase in time devoted to the spiritual disciplines of Bible study, prayer, and journaling.

Subjects

The subjects in this study were nineteen self-selected participants in the twelve-week Weigh Down Workshop that was offered at Christ the Redeemer Episcopal Church, Montgomery, Alabama from September 2, 1997 through November 18, 1997. All participants enrolled in the program voluntarily, with the primary objectives of losing weight and experiencing spiritual growth. Five participants were members of Christ the Redeemer; fourteen belonged to other area churches. (The program began with twenty-six persons, seven of them leaving the class within the first four weeks.) Participant ages ranged from late twenties to early seventies. The average age of participants was forty-four. Some of the participants had an obvious need for weight loss and may be described as significantly overweight to obese; others had no apparent need (to this observer).

A comparison group of five persons was also used in the study, and further described on page ----.

Instrumentation

Research-Designed Items

Two tools were used for measuring and evaluating the workshop participants' sense of spiritual well-being: the Spiritual Well-Being inventory (SWB) and the Spann-Fisher Codependency Scale (SFCS). (Please note Appendixes A and B respectively.) In addition, ten researcher-designed questions were asked after the two standardized instruments to gather additional information from subjects. (Note Appendixes C and D.)

The Spiritual Well-Being Scale (SWBS)

This scale (Appendix A) was developed with the purpose of measuring the role of religion and transcendence as continuous variables in assessing subjective well-being and predicting psychosocial risks (Bufford, Paloutzian, and Ellison 57). Ellison, in citing the National Interfaith Coalition on Aging (1975), defines spiritual well-being as "the affirmation of life in a relationship with God, self, community, and environment that nurtures and celebrates wholeness" ("Conceptualization" 331). It suggests that spiritual well-being involves a religious dimension and a social-psychological component. Ellison states that for genuine well-being to be realized, an individual's search for transcendence must be satisfied. "This refers to the sense of well-being we experience when we find

purposes to commit ourselves to which involve ultimate meaning for life. It refers to a non-physical dimension of awareness and experience which can best be termed spiritual" (Ellison, quoted by Fitzgerald 127). The instrument consists of twenty responses, using a six-point Likert-type scale for response. In addition to the overall Spiritual Well (SWB) score, two subscales measure Religious Well-Being (RWB) and Existential Well-Being (EWB). "All three scores assume that these are measures of continuous variables rather than dichotomous" (Fitzgerald 20). Furthermore, Ellison notes that spiritual well-being may not be tantamount to spiritual health, and that "spiritual well-being also does not appear to be the same as spiritual maturity" ("Conceptualization" 332).

The Spann-Fisher Codependency Scale (SFCS)

This instrument (Appendix B) was developed from observed characteristics of codependents that led the authors to define codependency as "a psychosocial condition that is manifested through a dysfunctional pattern of relating to others. This pattern is characterized by: extreme focus outside of self, lack of open expression of feelings, and, attempts to derive a sense of purpose through relationships" (Spann and Fischer 17). The scale measures primary codependency characteristics, as noted by Melody Beattie: care-taking, low self-worth, repression, obsession, control, denial, dependency, weak boundaries, poor communication, lack of trust, and anger (37-43). The scale postulates that codependency characteristics range on a continuum from low to high with the high range identified by greater psychosocial dysfunction. Positive correlations

were found between codependency and depression, external locus of control, femininity, anxiety, parental control, and enmeshment with family-of-origin. Occupation, age, income, and cohesion of family-of-origin were predicted to be unrelated to codependency (88-89).

The Spann-Fisher scale is a sixteen-item questionnaire using a six-point Likert-type scale for response to measure codependency. Codependency may be described as "a psychosocial condition that is manifested through a dysfunctional pattern of relating to others. This pattern is characterized by: extreme focus outside of self, lack of open expression of feelings, and, attempts to derive a sense of purpose through relationships" (Spann and Fisher 27).

Researcher-Designed Questions

In addition to the two standardized instruments used in the study, eight researcher-designed questions (information blanks) were added at the end of the first three questionnaires, asking for the respondent's social security number, present weight and waist measurement, weight loss goal in pounds, traumatic life events (which could indicate questionnaire response distortion), and time spent in the spiritual disciplines of Bible reading, prayer, and journaling (see Appendix C). At the end of the fourth questionnaire, the same information was gathered (questions #1-44), with the addition of four concluding questions (#45-48) to ascertain the perceived helpfulness and effectiveness of the program by its participants (see Appendix D).

Reliability and Validity of Instrumentation

The Spiritual Well-Being Scale (SWBS)

Research with the SWBS shows high test-retest reliability above .85 in three samples after one, four, and ten weeks (Bufford, Paloutzian, and Ellison 57-58). (Reliability refers to the extent to which repeated testing of the same group yields the same, or similar, results.) In one study, test-retest reliability coefficients from 100 student volunteers were .93 (SWB), .96 (RWB), and .86 (EWB). "The magnitude of these coefficients suggests the SWB has high reliability and internal consistency" (Ellison "Spiritual Well-Being," qtd. in Venable 43).

Ellison reported SWBS test-retest reliability as .93 for spiritual well-being (SWB), .96 for religious well-being (RWB), and .86 for emotional well-being (EWB) after one week, high internal consistency (alpha = .98 SWB, alpha =.87 RWB, alpha = .78 EWB), and predicted correlation with the UCLA Loneliness Scale, Purpose in Life Test, Intrinsic Religious Orientation, and self-esteem. ("Conceptualization" 333-335).

Ledbetter et al. conclude that "the SWBS has demonstrated an excellent ability to measure low scores, those that have traditionally been viewed as clinically significant, across a wide range of religious beliefs and practice" (53-55).

The Spann-Fischer Codependency Scale (SFCS)

Research on the SFCS demonstrates that the scale's reliability has been demonstrated across samples including two student groups (alpha = .73 and alpha = .80), Al-Anon group members with three-plus years of involvement (alpha =

= .80), Al-Anon group members with three-plus years of involvement (alpha = .77) and Al-Anon/Codependents Anonymous group members with a maximum involvement of four weeks (alpha =.77). They also demonstrate consistency of mean codependency scores (X = 52.32, X = 51.55, X = 51.99) across three student groups (N = 192, N = 228, N = 218). The reliability for test-retest factors in their fifteen-item version of SFCS was .87, and the current version is changed only by the addition of one item (Spann and Fisher 91, noted by Fitzgerald, 123). There have been no correlations found between test results and age, race, occupation, and family-of-origin cohesion (93-94).

Data Collection

At an introductory meeting to the twelve-week course (held August 19, 1997), the researcher presented to the prospective participants an overview of his intentions for the study. The self-selected subjects in the study were informed that the study was completely voluntary, and responses would be made anonymously (with social security numbers identifying respondents, instead of personal names.) On the first meeting (September 2, 1997), the first questionnaires were distributed at the beginning of the class, completed by the end of the class, and returned to the researcher. (There was 100 percent participation from all those attending.) The distribution-collection pattern was duplicated on October 6 and November 18. The final questionnaire and cover letter (see Appendix E) was mailed on December 16, 1997; thirteen were received by return mail by December 31, 1997; the remaining six were all received by

January 14, 1998. The answers on the questionnaires provided the raw data necessary for the study.

Independent and Dependent Variables

The independent variable (treatment) of this research is the twelve-week Weigh Down Workshop Course held September 2-November 18, 1997. The dependent variables are the scale measurements of weight, spiritual well-being, and codependency levels, the latter two as reflected in participants' recorded responses on the two instruments. This study attempts to discover the relationship between the independent variable (the course offered, i.e. treatment) and the dependent variables (weight loss or gain, spiritual well-being, and level of codependency).

Control Factors

The comparison group used in the study consisted of five women (average age of forty-six) involved in a two-hour mid-week gathering for personal sharing, Bible study, and prayer using a twelve-step model. The group has been meeting for the past two years, with ongoing change in membership and numerical attendance. (One of the group's members was known by the researcher to suffer from bulimia, and to be taking the anti-depressant Prozac, which in some persons causes weight gain. This, however, did not appear to be a factor with her.) The group was given the same four questionnaires distributed to the experimental group, and received during the same week that participants in the Weigh Down

course received their questionnaires. Control group questionnaires were returned on the same day as having been received. Since the comparison group did not participate in the Weigh Down Program, their fourth questionnaire did not contain questions 45-48, which were provided evaluation responses for Weigh Down participants.

Data Analysis

The scores from SWBS and the SFCS have been tabulated and tracked over the eighteen weeks of the study to determine if spiritual well-being increases and codependency levels decrease as a result of the program (treatment). Results for *t, z,* and *p* findings were subjected to the Wilcoxon Matched-Pairs Signed-Ranks Test and the Mann-Whitney U Matched Pairs Test.

In addition, responses to questions 37-47 have been tabulated to determine how the spiritual disciples of Bible reading, prayer, and journaling impact spiritual well-being and codependency levels. Weight loss over the eighteen-week period has also been recorded to determine if there is a correlation between this and individuals' spiritual well-being and codependency levels. Written responses regarding the program's effectiveness were gathered from the fourth questionnaire (questions 45-48), reported in Chapter 4 and Appendix G, and referenced where appropriate in order to provide evidence and testimony regarding changes in weight loss, perceived spiritual well-being, codependency levels, and time spent in the spiritual disciplines of Bible reading, prayer, and journaling.

Summary

This chapter has presented the purpose of the study: to identify, measure, and assess the level of personal spiritual and emotional growth experienced by participants in a twelve-week Weigh Down Workshop program held in a local church setting. The subjects were defined as nineteen persons who committed themselves to the program from September 2 through November 18, 1997. A comparison group of five persons was also used for the purpose of comparative analysis. The instruments used to measure participants' responses to the program were the Spiritual Well-Being Scale (SWBS) and the Spann-Fisher Codependency Scale (SFCS), followed by eight additional researcher-designed questions. The questionnaires were distributed and completed at the program's beginning, mid-point, conclusion, and one month after conclusion. The independent variable of the study (the twelve-week Weigh Down Workshop) and the dependent variable (the sense of personal, spiritual well-being and level of codependency experienced by the participants as a result of participating in the course) were described. Finally, the methodology of data analysis was presented.

CHAPTER 4

Findings of the Study

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to identify, measure, and assess the level of spiritual and emotional growth as experienced by participants in a twelve-week Weigh Down Workshop program held in a local church setting in the fall of 1997. This chapter will report the data gathered from the four completed questionnaires given to the nineteen participants in the study group and the five participants in the comparison group. The data will serve to confirm the hypothesis and provide answers to the three research questions regarding the effectiveness of the Weigh Down Workshop in the lives of those who participated in the twelve-week program.

Changes in Weight, Spiritual Well-Being, and Codependency Levels

The hypothesis for the study was that participants in the Weigh Down Program would demonstrate positive changes in their spiritual and emotional well-being as a result of engaging in the program: i.e. that spiritual well-being would increase, and that levels of codependency would decrease. The hypothesis proved correct, in light of the data gathered, reflected in Table 1 (which tabulates responses from the experimental group), and in Table 2 (which tabulates responses from the comparison group). Both tables also provide relevant data in answering the first two research questions:

Research Question #1: What are the changes in the level of subjects' spiritual well-being (as measured by the Spiritual Well-Being Scale [SWBS]), and codependency (as measured by the Spann-Fisher Codependency Scale [SFCS]) at the seminar's beginning (week one), at the program's mid-point (week six), at the program's conclusion (week twelve), and six weeks after the program's conclusion (December 31, 1997)?

Research Question #2: What is the correlation, if any, between weight reduction, one's sense of spiritual well-being, and levels of codependency?

In each table results for *t* scores and *p* levels were subjected to the Wilcoxon Matched-Pairs Signed-Ranks Test. These tables reflect in the eighteen-week cumulative *t* scores and *p* levels a high degree of significant change in the experimental group, and an insignificant level of change in the comparison group in the three areas measured: weight loss, spiritual well-being (SWBS), and codependency (SFCS). Of particular significance is the degree (or lack thereof) of change reflected between week one and week eighteen in each of the three areas measured in each group.

It will be noted that the eighteen-week cumulative weight loss in the study group was eleven and one-half pounds; the cumulative spiritual well-being increase was eighteen points, and the cumulative codependency level decrease was thirteen points. In the comparison group, weight increased by five pounds between week one and week eighteen; while the eighteen-week cumulative spiritual well-being increase was less than two points, and the cumulative codependency level decrease was five points.

TABLE 1
Pre-and Post-Test Changes Among Participants in the Weigh Down Program (n=19)

	X Group Mean	SD	diff.	t	p< *
WEIGHT					
Week 1	172.47	35.18			
Week 6	168.40	33.73	4.07	-1.54	.09
Week 12	167.19	28.74	1.21	-1.16	.25
Week 18	160.94	29.08	6.25	-1.61	.11
(Week 1-Week 18	172.47-160.94	35.18-29.08	11.53	-3.30	.001)
SWBS					
Week 1	91.10	17.19			
Week 6	102.83	14.67	11.73	-3.51	0
Week 12	104.94	13.60	-2.11	-1.08	.28
Week 18	109.21	10.74	-4.27	-2.00	.04
(Week 1-Week 18	91.10-109.21	7.19-10.74	-18.11	-3.62	0)
SFCS					
Week 1	57.32	10.47			
Week 6	53.61	9.34	3.71	-2.70	0
Week 12	46.00	12.91	7.61	-2.77	.01
Week 18	44.32	8.41	1.68	- .78	.49
(Week 1-Week 18	57.32-44.32	10.47-8.41	13.00	-3.62	0)

* p<.05, 2-tailed

TABLE 2
Pre-and Post-Test Changes Among Participants in the Control Group (n=5)

	Control Group Mean	SD	diff.	t	p< *
WEIGHT					
Week 1	146.00	25.18			
Week 6	146.67	24.13	-.67	0	1.00
Week 12	148.33	25.15	-1.66	-1.41	.16
Week 18	151.25	19.77	-2.93	-1.41	.16
(Week 1-Week 18	146.00-151.25	25.18-19.77	-5.25	-1.29	.19)
SWBS					
Week 1	99.20	14.24			
Week 6	105.60	6.59	-6.40	1.22	.22
Week 12	106.25	12.50	-.65	-.36	.72
Week 18	101.00	7.97	5.25	-1.83	.07
(Week 1-Week 18	99.20-101.00	14.24-7.97	-1.80	-.68	49)
SFCS					
Week 1	61.80	6.57			
Week 6	58.60	6.73	3.2	-2.03	.04
Week 12	51.50	1.73	7.1	-1.46	.14
Week 18	56.80	4.87	-5.30	-1.83	.07
(Week 1-Week 18	61.80-56.80	6.57-4.87	5.00	-1.22	.22)

* p< .05, 2-tailed

With Tables 1 and 2 focusing on the two groups individually, noting changes and differences in weight, spiritual well-being, and codependency levels, Table 3 provides a paired comparison of the two groups at the intervals of the first, sixth, twelfth, and eighteenth weeks. (Results in this table were subjected to the Mann-Whitney U Matched-Pairs Test for determining *z* scores and *p* levels.) The table

provides a helpful juxtaposed comparison between the study group and the comparison group, revealing by the eighteenth week a nine and one-half-point cumulative difference in weight, an eight-point difference in spiritual well-being, and a twelve and one-half-point difference in level of codependency.

Also in the eighteenth week, high significance is noted in the *p* levels in the areas of spiritual well-being (.05) and codependency (.02), as compared between the two groups. No significance was revealed in the weight category, even though the experimental group lost eleven and one-half pounds cumulatively, and the comparison group gained five pounds cumulatively.

TABLE 3
Comparative Changes Among Participants in the Two Groups

	X Group (n=19)		Control Group (n=5)				
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Group Diff.	z	p< *
WEIGHT							
Week 1	172.47	35.18	146.00	25.18	26.47	-1.02	.31
Week 6	168.40	33.73	146.67	24.13	21.73	-1.09	.28
Week 12	167.19	28.74	148.33	25.15	18.86	-1.30	.19
Week 18	160.94	33.08	151.25	19.77	9.69	-.61	.21
SWBS							
Week 1	91.10	17.19	99.20	14.24	-8.10	-1.03	.30
Week 6	102.83	14.67	105.60	6.58	-2.77	-.08	.94
Week 12	104.94	13.60	106.25	12.50	-1.31	-.31	.75
Week 18	109.21	10.74	101.00	7.97	8.21	-1.99	.05
SFCS							
Week 1	57.32	10.47	61.80	6.57	-4.48	-.43	.67
Week 6	53.61	9.34	58.60	6.73	-4.99	-1.05	.30
Week 12	46.00	12.91	51.50	1.73	-5.50	-1.57	.12
Week 18	44.32	8.41	56.80	4.87	-12.48	-2.35	.02

* p<.05, 2-tailed

Changes in Spiritual Disciplines (Bible Reading, Prayer, Journaling)

Each participant in the Weigh Down Program was encouraged to spend time daily in the spiritual disciplines of Bible reading, prayer, and personal journaling in one's notebook/guide. Scripture verses were offered each week for meditation and study during the week, accompanied by blank pages for recording one's thoughts and insights. Table 4 tracks participants' involvement with the spiritual disciplines of Bible reading, prayer, and journaling, and is presented to parallel Table 3 in design. (Results were subjected to the Mann-Whitney U Test to determine *z* scores and *p* levels.) This table provides relevant data in answering the third research question:

> **Research Question #3:** What is the correlation, if any, between spiritual well-being and levels of codependency, and the spiritual disciplines of personal Bible study, journaling, and prayer/meditation?

It will be noted that while both groups increased in time devoted to the spiritual disciplines over the course of the eighteen weeks, by the eighteenth week the experimental group was devoting 50 percent more time to Bible reading (38.8 minutes) and prayer (33.5 minutes) than did the comparison group. From week one to week eighteen, the comparison group reflected a higher percentile increase in time devoted to the spiritual disciplines than did the study group, yet demonstrated smaller gains in spiritual well-being and smaller decreases in codependency levels, as previously noted in Tables 1-3.

TABLE 4
Comparative Changes Among Participants in the Two Groups

	X Group (n=19)		Control Group (n=5)				
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Diff.	z	p< *
BIBLE READING							
(av. min. weekly)							
Week 1	21.68	29.32	13.00	15.65	8.68	-.72	.47
Week 6	41.47	73.78	11.00	11.40	30.47	-1.83	.07
Week 12	36.88	68.74	35.00	23.45	1.88	-1.09	.28
Week 18	38.79	78.83	25.00	20.31	13.79	-.22	.83
PRAYER							
(av. min. weekly)							
Week 1	25.00	23.09	16.00	10.84	9.00	-.36	.72
Week 6	35.29	35.73	19.00	12.45	6.29	-.44	.66
Week 12	32.94	27.22	30.00	21.60	2.94	-.05	.96
Week 18	33.53	38.42	22.00	14.40	11.53	-.68	.50
JOURNALING							
(av. min. weekly)							
Week 1	4.47	10.12	4.00	5.48	.47	-.66	.51
Week 6	6.13	9.07	6.00	6.52	.13	-.31	.76
Week 12	4.53	8.02	10.00	4.08	-5.47	-2.05	.04
Week 18	6.32	14.51	6.00	4.18	.32	-1.45	.15

* p<.05, 2-tailed

Achievement of Weight Loss Goals

On the last questionnaire, participants were asked to respond to the question:

Concerning weight loss, I:
a. lost the weight I was hoping to lose. b. made a good start in that direction
c. didn't lose much, if any, weight

Table 5 reflects the fulfillment of weight loss goals by participants in the Weigh Down Program. Responses reflect that 26 percent lost the weight desired, 63 percent made a good start in that direction, and 10 percent lost little, if any, weight.

TABLE 5
Fulfillment of Weight Loss Goals by Group Participants (n=19)

GOAL	RESPONSE
Lost All Weight Desired	5 (26%)
Made good start toward desired goal	12 (63%)
Lost little, if any, weight	2 (10%)

On the concluding questionnaire, two yes-no questions were asked to ascertain the participants' level of satisfaction with the course:

1. Overall, was the course helpful to you?
2. Would you recommend it to a friend?

All nineteen participants answered these two questions affirmatively. Question #48 asked for participants to note the most helpful aspects of the twelve-week course. Their responses are recorded in Appendix G.

Summary of Major Findings

Data collected during the eighteen weeks of the program suggest the following as noteworthy findings of the study:

- The Weigh Down Program enabled participants to experience personal growth and improvement in three dimensions: the physical, the emotional, and the spiritual. Physically; the group lost weight; spiritually the group increased in spiritual well-being; emotionally the group decreased in levels of codependency. (It should be noted that each of the nineteen participants in the Weigh Down Program lost weight. The greatest individual weight loss was twenty-six pounds; the smallest was two and one-half pounds.)

- Although only five participants (26 percent) lost all desired weight, each of the nineteen Weigh Down Participants stated at the conclusion of the course that the program had been helpful, and that he/she would recommend it to another person. Even those who lost only a few pounds still found the program beneficial, presumably because of the spiritual and emotional enrichment gained through small group dynamics, personal sharing, the motivational video and audio tapes, and the spiritual disciplines of Bible reading, prayer, and journaling. (Note supporting comments in Appendix G.)
- There was a significant contrast in the comparison group, which evidenced a weight gain (five pounds) over the eighteen-week period, and showed only modest gain in spiritual well-being and modest decrease in codependency levels.
- The findings within the study group suggest a correlation between weight loss, spiritual well-being, and codependency tendencies. As weight decreased, spiritual well-being increased, while codependency tendencies were reduced.
- Participants in the Weigh Down Program demonstrated higher mean time devoted to the spiritual disciplines of Bible reading and prayer than did comparison group members: the former exceeding the latter by 50 percent in each of the two areas. Time given to journaling was almost equal in the two groups.

CHAPTER 5

Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

This chapter presents a summary of the problem, procedures, and findings of the study. Conclusions are formulated on the basis of the findings related to the general research questions and limitations of the study. Recommendations are made in light of these conclusions, and final theological reflections complete the presentation of this investigation.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to identify, measure, and assess the level of spiritual and emotional growth experienced by participants in a twelve-week Weigh Down Workshop program held in a local church setting. Having noted the remarkable growth and notoriety demonstrated by the Weigh Down Workshop in the American Church in the past several years, the research aimed to measure its effectiveness in the lives of those participating in a typical twelve-week session in a local church setting. Nineteen persons made up the study group (sixteen women and three men), with five persons (all women) comprising the comparison group. The average age of participants in the study group was forty-three. The average age of comparison group participants was forty-six. The instruments used in this study were the Spiritual Well-Being Scale, the Spann-Fischer Codependency Scale, and ten researcher-designed questions.

Responses to Research Questions

In Chapter 1 it was hypothesized that participants in the Weigh Down Workshop would not only improve their physical being, but also demonstrate positive changes in their spiritual well-being and levels of codependency by the course's conclusion; i.e. that one's level of spiritual well-being would increase, while one's level of codependency would decrease. It was also hypothesized that participants would evidence an increase in time devoted to the spiritual disciplines of Bible study, prayer, and journaling. Three general research questions were posed, aimed at assessing the effectiveness of the Weigh Down program in its purpose to enable participants to lose unwanted weight:

Research Question #1

> What are the changes in participants' weight, level of spiritual well-being (as measured by the Spiritual Well-Being Scale [SWB]), and codependency (as measured by the Spann-Fisher Codependency Scale [SFCS]) at the twelve-week seminar's beginning (week one), at the program's mid-point (week six), at the program's conclusion (week twelve), and six weeks after the program's conclusion (December 31, 1997)?

In the study group, mean weight at the beginning of the course was 172.5 pounds; spiritual well-being was 91.1, and the codependency level was 57.3. Six weeks after the course's conclusion (December 31, 1997), mean weight had dropped eleven and one-half pounds, while spiritual well being had increased eighteen points, and codependency levels had decreased thirteen points. In the comparison group, weight increased over the eighteen-week period from 146

pounds to 151 pounds; spiritual well-being showed a less than two-point increase from 99.2 to 101; codependency dropped from 61.8 to 56.8. The T-scores of Table 1 demonstrated a high degree of significance in the study group in the three measured areas (weight loss, spiritual well-being, and codependency.) The gathered data, therefore, indicate significant degrees of overall group improvement in all areas under study and consideration: the physical (bodily weight loss), the spiritual (heightened spiritual well-being), and the emotional (decreased indicators of codependency).

Research Question #2

> What is the correlation, if any, between weight reduction, one's sense of spiritual well-being, and levels of codependency?

The findings of the study suggest a positive correlation between weight reduction and one's sense of spiritual well-being and levels of codependency. This is reflected in the comparative data between the Weigh Down study group and the comparison group. The latter group increased in overall group weight by five pounds over the eighteen weeks of study, and showed only a two point gain in spiritual well-being and a five point reduction in codependency levels. Given the group's purpose and focus of interpersonal sharing, Bible study, and prayer, some positive improvement should not be surprising or unexpected.

The results of the experimental group, however, demonstrate a notable contrast with the comparison group, given the former's mean weight loss of eleven and one-half pounds, accompanied by an eighteen point gain in spiritual

well-being and a thirteen point decrease in codependency levels. Similarly, high significance is reflected in the eighteen-week cumulative *t* scores and *p* level of the Wilcoxin Signed Ranks Test, as noted in Tables 1 and 2 of Chapter 4. The results suggest a positive link between weight loss and spiritual and emotional growth as manifested in the experimental group.

Research Question #3

> What is the correlation, if any, between spiritual well-being and levels of codependency and the spiritual disciplines of personal Bible study, journaling, and prayer/meditation?

Qualitative evidence, particularly those comments made by group participants at the conclusion of the course, suggests that the spiritual disciplines of personal Bible study and prayer/meditation were meaningful and important program components to group members. Four noted Bible study as "most helpful," and three noted prayer as such. Four noted the helpfulness of the audio and video tapes, and five respondents noted the support of the small group and interaction therein. (See Appendix G.) Having attended each of the weekly gatherings, with the exception of one, the value and effectiveness of the small group was again confirmed by observing the group's growth in trust, vulnerability, and accountability over the course of the twelve weeks. Much of what was written concerning the effectiveness of the small group in American life and culture (see pages 26-34) assumed visible form and shape in this particular study group.

Of particular interest are the data of the comparison group, as related to the disciplines of Bible reading, prayer, and journaling. The comparison group showed a greater increase in all areas over the course of the eighteen weeks, as compared with the experimental group findings: Bible reading in the comparison group increased 90 percent, and 80 percent in the study group; prayer in the comparison group increased 37 percent, and 25 percent in the study group; journaling in the comparison group increased 50 percent, and 41percent in the study group. From the standpoint of actual time devoted, however, it is noteworthy that Weigh Down participants spent 50 percent more time in prayer and Bible study than did comparison group members. Journaling was marginal in each group, with approximately six minutes as a weekly average.

The data, then, do not provide as clear a response to the third research question as they do for the first two questions. The spiritual components of the Weigh Down program are clearly important, indeed essential, to the ultimate purpose and success of the program. Their correlation to spiritual well-being and codependency, however, are more nebulous than the suggested correlation between weight loss and spiritual well-being and codependency.

Additional Questions Raised by the Study

In addition to the study's fundamental research questions, the results of the study raise other questions for consideration: First, what accounts for the significant gain in spiritual well-being and the significant decrease in codependency tendencies in the experimental group, as compared with the very

modest changes of the comparison group? The research suggests two possible answers: weight loss and emotional expectation.

First, and perhaps most obvious, is the marked reduction in group weight in the study group from a mean of 172.4 pounds to 160.9 pounds. The primary purpose of the group was weight loss; participants came with that as their stated purpose and settled goal. It is likely that achieving this goal did give participants a sense of personal satisfaction, accomplishment, and success, thereby improving their spiritual and emotional health, as clearly reflected in the SWBS and the SFCS measurements. Control group members had no such goal or focus, and by the end of the eighteen-week period recorded a five-pound weight gain. (It should also be acknowledged that a larger comparison group might have provided more accurate comparative results.)

A second possible explanation is the spiritual "climate" inherent in the Weigh Down program itself, and the expectation level such a climate fosters in Weigh Down participants. Participants come to the group for a short-term, focused period (twelve weeks), expecting to receive help, improvement, and blessing. They enter a highly developed and acclaimed "program," complete with workbook, audio and video tapes, and trained instructor. These components tend to foster an atmosphere of heightened expectation and hope. Within three to four weeks, one was aware of an esprit-de-corps in the group, as well as a developing sense of camaraderie and accountability week by week. In addition, participants make a substantial financial investment ($103.00 registration fee) to participate,

an action that typically heightens one's expectations and outlooks. These important components of the Weigh Down group were largely absent in the comparison group. As an established, settled group, accustomed to a weekly routine, it lacked the higher level of expectation, specialized purpose, and overall sense of vitality and first-blush enthusiasm found in the experimental group.

A second question raised by the study concerns timing: was the time-frame of the study (September-December) significant? The Weigh Down program concluded the week before Thanksgiving, with final follow-up reports being sent in the week following Christmas. Although not strategically planned by the researcher, the conclusion of the study during the holiday season was ideal, since it came at the one six week-period of the year when Americans are most prone to overeat. (January is infamous as the month for paying debts, and losing "holiday weight.") It is therefore all the more noteworthy that the Weigh Down group actually concluded the program having lost significant weight: eleven and one-half pounds by the beginning of January, 1998. Concurrently, the five-pound weight gain of the comparison group was almost to be expected.

A third question raised by the study concerns its effectiveness in the life of a local congregation: does it make a valuable contribution to a local church's ministry? Viewed from the perspective of a pastor, this researcher's response is a strong and affirmative "yes." In a culture increasingly concerned with issues of health, fitness, and self-care, what the Weigh Down program offers is both appealing and compelling--both to the committed Christian, and to the

unchurched person or non-Christian. The Weigh Down program offers a unique blend of discipleship for the convinced Christian, and a "safe place" for a non-believer to hear Biblical truths, in an atmosphere where a mutually-shared goal exists: the desire to lose weight. While one may feel reluctant to invite an unchurched person to a Sunday morning worship service, one may feel very differently about inviting such a person to a mid-week gathering where perceived and real needs are being addressed in a non-threatening atmosphere. In short, it is a ministry combining evangelism with discipleship; a description amply supported by participants' comments in Appendix G.

A fourth, and final, question raised by the study concerns the overall message sent by the Weigh Down program, and the Christian diet industry as a whole. In the words of Bringle, is one guilty of worshipping a "god of thinness" in one's desire to lose weight? How important is physical appearance--especially to God? Is being overweight displeasing to God? Does God desire all people (especially Christians) to be trim or slender? As noted in Chapter 2, a number of Christian authors and weight-loss proponents have made thinness a goal (or in Bringle's view, "a god"), and assume from the start a "God-loves-thinness" theology. The very titles of the books authored by Shedd, Hunter, Lovett, Kreml, and Coyle betray a fundamental fixation on thinness.

The Weigh Down approach, however, focuses less on food and thinness and more on spirituality and health. Such health involves obedience to God, and being freed from any material or physical attraction that would dominate our lives

and hold us in bondage--food, alcohol, materialism, work, etc. In this particular program, the attraction is the "magnetic pull of the refrigerator." From this, one needs to "rise above" through ongoing repentance and faith, and Weigh Down offers the tools and teaching to help realize that goal.

Just as the focus of the Genesis narrative is not on food or fruit, but on ultimate obedience and responsibility to God, the Weigh Down program's focus is not on food, but on responsible obedience and personal yielding to the lordship of Christ. Shamblin makes the distinction in the clearest terms: "Using the Weigh Down Workshop approach, we will not ask the food to behave. Instead, we will teach you how to behave" (Diet 31). Such behavior is found in a life focused on God and His Word: "Focusing refers to several things: focusing on the long-term reward and not the short-term desire for food, focusing on what God wants rather than giving in to what the flesh wants, and concentrating on others in place of self" (Diet 131).

Limitations of the Study and Suggestions for Further Study

While the results of the Weigh Down study group demonstrate the effectiveness of the program, accompanied by positive participant evaluation, no decisive or definitive correlation can be drawn between weight loss and spiritual and emotional growth. The study was not designed to give conclusive statistical proof regarding the actual interplay and correlation between the three variables of weight loss, spiritual well-being, and codependency. Inferential evidence points

to such a correlation, but further research is needed to establish a more definitive cause-and-effect relationship.

In addition, no further data were collected on participants in either the study or comparison group after the eighteenth week. The effectiveness of the program was demonstrated during its duration, but further research would need to be conducted to determine longer-term benefits (spiritual and physical) of the program in the lives of its participants.

The study focused on the Weigh Down Workshop exclusively, without making statistical comparisons with other Christian or biblically-based programs, as described in Chapter 2. Future studies might involve such comparisons, evaluating the effectiveness of the Weigh Down Workshop in relation to other Christian programs (particularly Houston's "First Place"). Another possible study might involve a comparison between the Weigh Down program and a secular diet plan.

Another potential area for study lies within the Weigh Down program itself, to track its effectiveness as it experiences further growth and improvement. In February of 1998 a new study guide was published, along with an newly updated video series (used in group session) and audio series (listened to by participants between sessions). Several recent comments from current participants indicate that these new materials provide significant improvement over preceding materials. An evaluation and study of these new materials would prove helpful.

In Chapter 2 a review of the literature on codependency revealed the extensive writing on the subject, and the significant role codependency has played in American life and culture in the past fifteen years. Dr. Virginia Todd Holeman, a faculty member of Asbury Theological Seminary states, "It became the disease of choice of the 1980's." She notes that the increasing trend today is to regard people less as "codependent," and more as "under or over responsible" with regard to interpersonal relationships. Further study in the area of personal responsibility as related to issues of overweight and overeating would prove helpful.

Concluding Theological Reflections

In reflecting on the Weigh Down Program and its participants, two passages of Scripture seem appropriate and relevant. First, in I Corinthians 6:19-20 the Apostle Paul writes the following words of instruction and challenge to the Corinthian Church: "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body." Second, Jesus, summarizing the Old Testament Law, reminds His followers to "love the Lord your God with all your heart . . ." and to "love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt. 22:37,39). Jesus identifies three objects of a Christian's love: God, neighbor, and self.

The instructions from both Paul and Jesus are complementary, and serve as fitting theological foundations for the Weigh Down program. The program

emphasizes proper self-care, or love of self, which results in caring for the physical body, the "temple of the Holy Spirit" (I Cor. 6:19). In assuming responsibility to care properly for the physical body--"the temple"--one is in fact nurturing the soul or spirit, as one "glorifies God in (one's) body" (I Cor. 6:20). The Weigh Down program teaches that weight control is one very practical (and necessary) way to honor God by caring for "God's temple." It offers practical steps for loving God (through obedience and self-control) and loving yourself (by caring for one's body).

Psychologists Minirth and Meier state that they find "codependent relationships in almost all cases of eating compulsion" (Recovery 112), and are intent to address both psychological and emotional factors in the life of an overweight person, believing that "most diet plans fail because underlying emotional issues are not resolved" (Recovery 333). The Weigh Down program emphasizes a spiritual-emotional approach to weight loss, helping the person to identify and distinguish between "heart hunger" (emotional-spiritual) and "stomach hunger" (physiological). The essence of the program is learning to feed the heart with spiritual food through a relationship with God, based on growing trust and obedience.

Results of the study suggest that when applied to the area of weight loss, the fruit of such a relationship is three-fold: weight reduction, heightened spiritual well-being, and diminished levels of codependency. In the program's terminology, this is the equivalent of "entering the Promised Land," where one is

enabled to rise above the "magnetic pull of the refrigerator" in submission to the will of God (Diet 280). For those persons who find themselves "in Egypt," held captive by physical appetite and its accompanying feelings of frustration and failure, the Weigh Down Workshop continues to prove itself as an effective instrument of God to lead people out of Egypt, through "the wilderness of testing," and finally into a Promised Land of greater health, hope, and wholeness in Christ.

APPENDIX A
Spiritual Well-Being Scale

For each of the following statements circle the choice that best indicates the extent of your agreement or disagreement as it describes your personal experience:

SA	=	Strongly Agree	D	=	Disagree
MA	=	Moderately Agree	MD	=	Moderately Disagree
A	=	Agree	SD	=	Strongly Disagree

1. I don't find much satisfaction in private prayer with God.	SA	MA	A	D	MD	SD
2. I don't know who I am, where I came from, or where I am going.	SA	MA	A	D	MD	SD
3. I believe that God loves me and cares about me.	SA	MA	A	D	MD	SD
4. I feel that life is a positive experience.	SA	MA	A	D	MD	SD
5. I believe that God is impersonal and not interested in my daily situations.	SA	MA	A	D	MD	SD
6. I feel unsettled about my future.	SA	MA	A	D	MD	SD
7. I have a personally meaningful relationship with God.	SA	MA	A	D	MD	SD
8. I feel very fulfilled and satisfied with life.	SA	MA	A	D	MD	SD
9. I don't get much personal strength and support from my God.	SA	MA	A	D	MD	SD
10. I feel a sense of well-being about the direction my life is headed in.	SA	MA	A	D	MD	SD
11. I believe that God is concerned about my problems.	SA	MA	A	D	MD	SD
12. I don't enjoy much about life.	SA	MA	A	D	MD	SD
13. I don't have a personally satisfying relationship with God.	SA	MA	A	D	MD	SD
14. I feel good about my future.	SA	MA	A	D	MD	SD
15. My relationship with God helps me not feel lonely.	SA	MA	A	D	MD	SD
16. I feel that life is full of conflict and unhappiness.	SA	MA	A	D	MD	SD
17. I feel most fulfilled when I'm in close communion with God.	SA	MA	A	D	MD	SD
18. Life doesn't have much meaning.	SA	MA	A	D	MD	SD
19. My relation with God contributes to my sense of well-being.	SA	MA	A	D	MD	SD
20. I believe there is some real purpose for my life.	SA	MA	A	D	MD	SD

APPENDIX B

The Spann-Fischer Codependency Scale

(SA=Strongly Agree; MA=Moderately Agree; A=Agree; D=Disagree; MD=Moderately Disgree; SD=Strongly Disag

21. It is hard for me to make decisions.	SA	MA	A	D	MD	SD
22. It is hard for me to say "no."	SA	MA	A	D	MD	SD
23. It is hard for me to accept compliments graciously.	SA	MA	A	D	MD	SD
24. Sometimes I almost feel bored or empty if I don't have problems to focus on.	SA	MA	A	D	MD	SD
25. I usually ***do not*** do things for other people that they are capable of doing for themselves.	SA	MA	A	D	MD	SD
26. When I do something nice for myself I usually feel guilty.	SA	MA	A	D	MD	SD
27. I ***do not*** worry very much.	SA	MA	A	D	MD	SD
28. I tell myself that things will get better when people in my life change what they are doing.	SA	MA	A	D	MD	SD
29. I seem to have relationships where I am always there for them, but they are rarely there for me.	SA	MA	A	D	MD	SD
30. Sometimes I get focused on one person to the extent of neglecting other relationships and responsibilities.	SA	MA	A	D	MD	SD
31. I seem to get into relationships that are painful for me.	SA	MA	A	D	MD	SD
32. I don't usually let others see the "real" me.	SA	MA	A	D	MD	SD
33. When someone upsets me I will hold it in for a long time, but once in a while I explode.	SA	MA	A	D	MD	SD
34. I will usually go to any lengths to avoid open conflict.	SA	MA	A	D	MD	SD
35. I often have a sense of dread or impending doom.	SA	MA	A	D	MD	SD
36. I often put the needs of others ahead of my own.	SA	MA	A	D	MD	SD

APPENDIX C
(Used on the first three questionnaires)

37. Please write the last 4 digits of your SS Number: _____ _____ _____ _____,
and the initial of your mother's maiden name: _____

38. Your weight as of tonight: _____ pounds.

39. Your waist measurement: _____ inches.

40. Do you have a goal for weight loss over the next 12 weeks of the Weigh Down Program? If so, how much do you intend (or at least hope) to lose? _____ lbs.

41. Has anything traumatic or unusual happened in your life over the past 3-4 weeks that has made you feel especially "low" or especially "high" in emotion, outlook, or attitude?
(death of close friend, severed relationship, new romance, etc.) Circle one:

Yes No

If yes, briefly describe (3-4 words): _____

42. On the ***average***, in the past 6 weeks how much time would you estimate you've given to personal *Bible reading or study* in a typical day? _____ minutes.

43. On the ***average***, in the past 6 weeks how much time would you estimate you've given to personal *prayer or meditation* in a typical day? _____ minutes.

44. On the ***average***, in the past 6 weeks how much time would you estimate you've given to personal *"journaling"* (recording thoughts or impressions in a diary or journal) in a typical day? _____ minutes.

APPENDIX D

Used on the 4th (Final) Questionnaire

37. Please write the last 4 digits of your SS Number: _____ _____ _____ _____,
and the initial of your mother's maiden name: _____

38. Your weight as of today: _____ pounds. (Date: Dec. _____, 1997)

39. Your waist measurement: _____ inches.

40. Do you have a goal for continued weight loss in the future? If so, how much do you intend (or at least hope) to lose? _____ lbs.

41. Has anything traumatic or unusual happened in your life over the past 3-4 weeks that has made you feel especially "low" or especially "high", in emotion, outlook, or attitude?
(death of close friend, severed relationship, new romance, etc.) Circle one:

Yes No

If yes, briefly describe (3-4 words): _____

42. On the ***average***, in the past 4 weeks (since the conclusion of the Weigh Down Workshop) how much time would you estimate you've given to personal *Bible reading or study* in a typical day? _____ minutes.

43. On the ***average***, in the past 4 weeks how much time would you estimate you've given to personal *prayer or meditation* in a typical day? _____ minutes.

44. On the ***average***, in the past 4 weeks how much time would you estimate you've given to personal *"journaling"* (recording thoughts or impressions in a diary or journal) in a typical day? _____ minutes.

45. Overall, was the Program helpful to you? Yes No Undecided

46. Concerning weight loss, I:
a. lost the weight I was hoping to lose. b. I made a good start in that direction
c. didn't lose much, if any, weight.

46. What did you find most helpful during the 12 week program?

_____

47. Would you recommend it to a friend? Yes No

12-16-97

APPENDIX E

CHRIST THE REDEEMER
Episcopal Church

6801 Vaughn Road Montgomery, Alabama 36116
Phone (334) 272-3890 Fax (334) 272-9398

The Rev. J. Coleman Tyler, Rector

TO: "Graduates" of the recent Weigh Down Class December 16, 1997
FROM: Coleman Tyler

Hello, Friends!

Hope all is well with you at this busy time of year.

I have a huge favor to ask of you. You guessed it! Would you take a few minutes to fill out the FINAL QUESTIONNAIRE? I'd be very grateful. Then begins the analysis of all the data for my dissertation - chapters 4 and 5.

Enclosed is a return-addressed, stamped envelope. If you could simply put your completed questionnaire in the envelope, and ***return it to me by Friday, Dec. 26*** I would be very, very grateful.

May your Christmas be filled with the peace and presence of the Lord. And thanks again for all your help in my dissertation project. (I have mailed in the first two chapters, so things are moving forward, slowly but surely!)

God bless you.

Sincerely in Christ,

Coleman Tyler
Pastor

Tyler 95

Praise/Thanksgiving:

I will ever praise you. —Psalm 71:6b

APPENDIX F
(Sample page from Weigh Down Workbook)

Confession:

Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. —Psalm 32:1

Insights from God's Word:

Desert Hint: Cut your food in half. (One lady refused to cut her *foot-long* hot dog in half!)

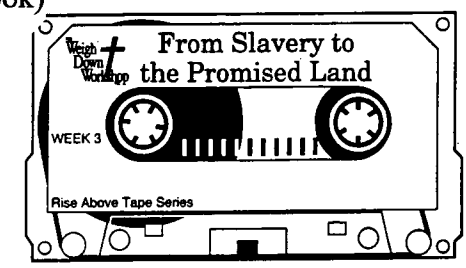
Tyler 96

APPENDIX F

(Sample page from Weigh Down Workbook)

THE Weigh Down Workshop INC.

Homework



Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help, who rely on horses, who trust in the multitude of their chariots and in the great strength of their horsemen, but do not look to the Holy One of Israel, or seek help from the Lord.

—Isaiah 31:1

These scriptures are from the tape *From Slavery to the Promised Land:*	Isaiah 30:1-3a,7 Isaiah 31:1 Deuteronomy 8:2-5 Hebrews 12:5-12 Leviticus 26:18-25	Leviticus 26:40-44 Deuteronomy 28 Deuteronomy 6:1-9 Deuteronomy 8,9,10,11	Deuteronomy 9:11-14 Deuteronomy 9:23-24 Deuteronomy 8:17-20 Psalm 81:5-16

From listening to this audiocassette:

1. What does Egypt represent?

   _____

2. Why should we not return or depend on Egypt?

   _____

3. Why do you think we have to go through the desert on the way to the promised land? (See Deuteronomy 8:2)

   _____

4. What are some things that we need to make it across the desert?

   _____

5. Read Deuteronomy 8:4-5 and Hebrews 12:4-13. List some of the rules and rewards of being disciplined.

   _____

   _____

   _____

6. What about Weigh Down is too difficult for you to do? Describe.

   _____

7. Read Deuteronomy 30:11-14. What is your response to this verse?

   _____

APPENDIX G

Most Personally Beneficial Aspects from Weigh Down Program As Noted by Participants to Question #46 (n=19)

1. "Contact With God."
2. "Hunger is OK."
3. "Finding the relationship between God and weight loss."
4. "How Scripture relates to this area of my life."
5. "The inspiration of the tapes."
6. "The presence of God in the little details of life."
7. "The support of the group."
8. "Prayer and Bible study."
9. "The God-given hunger mechanism that we need to heed to attain best weight loss."
10. "Revelations in God's Word about food and eating; obedience to heart hunger vs. head hunger."
11. "Group discussion and prayer, individual prayer, audio tapes."
12. "Honesty and openness of group sharing."
13. "Became convinced that there is good, and Someone cares and is out there looking after us."
14. "Support of the group"
15. "The tapes to take home and listen to over and over again."
16. "More closeness in desire to please God."
17. "A new way of seeing food - a change of focus."
18. "Prayer and support of group members."
19. "Finding greater closeness with God through His Word & others in group."

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